

Ham radio volunteer Mason aids Harvey relief

By PAUL KESSINGER

Dennis Mason, Marysville, was one of the volunteers who assisted with the Hurricane Harvey relief in late August. But Mason did not have to travel hundreds of miles to the Texas coast.

Mason is a member of the American Radio Relay League, the national association for amateur radio operators, an organization that emphasizes community service.

"As a non-profit representing the Amateur Radio Service and through our programs and services the ARRL is committed to supporting radio amateurs engaged in public service, including assisting in emergency operations during disasters, such as the recent Houston hurricane," Mason said. "Amateur radio operators assisted in relaying information to the public about locating people that were displaced and other things."

The league is based in Newington, Conn. Communication manager Dave Isgur expressed pride in the way its members volunteered to help out during many 2017 natural disasters, which included several hurricanes and the large wildfires in California.

"We have had a long-standing memorandum with the American Red Cross on the services that we can provide during these types of situations," Isgur said. "We salute our members who put themselves in harm's way by going to hurricane-ravaged areas to provide communication services for wellness checks and helping families send messages to their loved ones, and to provide important information on conditions for first responders."

Amateur radio operators are not first responders but they can provide first responders with vital information in areas where other forms of communication, such as cell phones, have failed, he said. The league provides training to members on how to handle these situations.

The league depends on amateur radio operators who are physically in the location of failed communications to send messages to other radio operators, such as Mason, who are in places where they can then inform first responders.

"In the beginning of radio broadcast, many people who their own transmitting and receiving stations and were mostly used to visiting back and forth among themselves," Mason said. "Amateur radio continued through history and evolved to the present as a primary backbone and backup for many forms of communication."