

Well-known volunteer lends his ham radio skills to Sumter

By Michael Fortuna, Daily Sun Staff Writer ---- May 21, 2018



Harold Lloyd, of the Village of Glenbrook, serves as a volunteer amateur radio operator with Sumter County Emergency Management.

Photo by: George Horsford, Daily Sun

In public, he is known as Harold Lloyd. On the radio waves, his call sign is W4OE.

For more than a decade, the Village of Glenbrook resident has donated his knowledge of being a ham radio operator to Sumter County Emergency Management.

“I’ve enjoyed being able to provide a service to the community,” Lloyd said.

In February, the members of emergency management

recognized Lloyd for his work with Skywarn, a program of the National Weather Service in which ham radio operators relay information about severe weather in their particular area. While he is stepping away from working with Skywarn, he will continue to assist emergency management.

“He’s been our strongest supporter going way back,” said David Casto, director of emergency management in Sumter County. “We’re proud of him. He’s done so much for the county and others, and he’s still going strong.”

Since 2002, Lloyd, who also is president of The Villages chapter of the Quarter Century Wireless Association, has done everything from being the emergency coordinator of the volunteers on several occasions to helping out with training and serving as one of the group’s technical experts.

“He can take something complex and make it simple for me,” Casto said.

Lloyd has established nets, or on-the-air gatherings of operators relaying information about any inclement weather in the area. Twice a week, Lloyd has led these nets as a communications drill to make sure everything is ready in case an emergency occurs.

When Hurricane Irma came through the state last year, Lloyd said, the volunteers were on duty for quite a few hours.

“We do what we have to do,” Lloyd said. “You’re never prepared enough. You can have all the training, but you’re doing something you’re not prepared for. You hope the training you had keeps you through that.”

Ham radio comes into play when major forms of communication become overwhelmed. If cellphone towers lose their signals or if too many people try to use their phones at once, it causes the system to shut down.

Ham radio operators can plug their equipment into a generator to send out messages between individuals.

“We provide the communication,” Lloyd said.

Lloyd’s introduction to the world of ham radio switched on some 60 years ago.

When he was 14 living in Kirksville, Missouri, his family had a large Philco radio that picked up various bands. One day, Lloyd was pushing buttons and turning the dial when he came across people carrying on a conversation.

“I thought, ‘What is this?’” Lloyd said.

Lloyd’s father revealed that Lloyd was hearing ham radio operators.

In 1952, Lloyd got a novice radio license from the Federal Communications Commission office in Kansas City, Missouri, and jumped into the world of ham radio with both feet.

His first receiver was a National NC-101X, which he said was 76 pounds, what he called “a big one.” He thinks he may have made his first call to someone in Iowa.

He discovered learning the ins and outs of ham radio to be quite technical.

“There are a lot of terms you have to know,” Lloyd said. “There are a lot of electric principles. Algebra was a help.”

Some 40 years later, when Lloyd was living in Canton, Georgia, he became an Amateur Radio Emergency Service coordinator for Cherokee County, thanks to a couple of members recruiting him.

“I volunteered without knowing what I was volunteering for,” Lloyd said.

After moving to Florida, he wanted to continue his newfound endeavor.

Whenever he is finished helping out with severe weather situations in the Sumter County EOC, Lloyd said he feels more tired than tense.

“You have to be alert,” Lloyd said. “There’s a feeling of accomplishment of helping. It’s something you look forward to.”

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