



Michael Johnson | Daily Sun

Amateur Radio Club Members Still On the Air in The Villages

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When all else fails, it's the amateur radio operators who are a vital link to the outside world.

It should be no surprise then, that members of The Villages Amateur Radio club are still in communication with one another.

The group already had a regular chat once a week.

"Even before the crisis, we had a regular Monday evening net on our repeaters," said George Briggs of the Village of Pinellas, who's president of the club. "It runs a half hour to 50 minutes. People talk about what they've been doing."

The club's repeaters allow radio operators to use comparatively

longer distances. The Villages club has two such devices: one in Wildwood, another at The Villages Regional Hospital. The repeaters' main function is to facilitate radio traffic for the club's Emergency Communications Team, which swings into action during emergencies such as hurricanes.

The Monday chat has drawn more participants since the stay-at-home recommendations came out, Briggs said.

Another method of transmission that is popular among club members is FT-8, which sends digital signals in short bursts. It's ideal for weak-signal transmissions and is popular among amateurs in The Villages because of the prohibition on most outdoor radio antennas.

"We're using that especially now

hands. There's almost always a band available," Briggs said.

As far as old-school globe-spanning short wave goes, Briggs says there has been little talk of the pandemic on the air.

"I haven't heard anything about the coronavirus yet — no guys from Italy talking about how things are there," he said.

Briggs does have access to a site outside The Villages where he has an antenna and equipment for transmitting long distances. Club members would go and participate in contests to see how many places in the world they could reach via short wave. But with the quarantine, that is on hold.

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