

Radio waves remain free in Calvert

Local operators use frequencies for emergency response, fun

BY JONNA JONES
STAFF WRITER

The first thing to make clear about amateur radio operators is that they are not amateurs.

"We're far from amateurs," said Dennis Bowling, president of the Calvert Amateur Radio Association (CARA). "It's the oldest radio club in Calvert County."

Members are simply termed amateurs due to the fact that use of the airwaves must remain free and members can receive no compensation for its use. According to the members, amateurs and volunteers are two sides of the same coin.

The CARA is indeed involved in many areas of public service, including disaster preparation and the Military Affiliate Radio System, which aids in communication between sailors and soldiers overseas



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CALVERT AMATEUR RADIO ASSOCIATION

Shawn Donley of Huntingtown, standing, sets up a broadcasting station during International Lighthouse Day at Cove Point Donley is a member of the Calvert Amateur Radio Association. Below, a temporary antenna was put in place at Cove Point during International Lighthouse Day.

with their families. They are also involved in parades, and communications for health and welfare.

"Amateur radio has a lot to offer everybody. I do it because I've always been involved in public service," said Leslie Dickey, secretary of the CARA. "It's a way to stay available for community needs."

They can talk to the International Space Station or just get the local weather report. They even worked with the Salvation Army when planes crashed into the Pentagon and served as back-up communication when tornados devastated La Plata a few years back.

The CARA is also working with local middle and high schools to introduce hands-on learning through amateur radio technology. It can be applied to many different forms of study, including geography and science.

"They can apply [it] with their learning," Dickey said.

On Oct. 28, the CARA will be providing health and welfare services at the Fall Festival held at the Greenwell State Park in St. Mary's County. They also volunteer their help to the March of Dimes and the Marine Corp. Marathon.

Some of the CARA members are also drawn to the association by technical interests, designing and building their own equipment.

Amateur radio has seen other progressions in the county, including the development of local busi-

ness. LDG Electronics, a leading vendor of auto tuners headquartered in St. Leonard, was founded here and ships its products globally.

There is a lot of crossover between the new technology that's so much a part of daily life and the amateur radios. It's possible to link up to the Web through a radio link using technology the size of a credit card. Most of the new technology used today sprouted from amateur radio technology — everything that cell phones do originally came from amateur radio. Enthusiasts have had the capability of sending photos since the 1930s, long before the picture cell phone was even a thought.

"The nerdy things that we did are status quo," Bowling said.

Even today, amateur radio is more reliable than a cell phone in times of emergency or inclement weather.

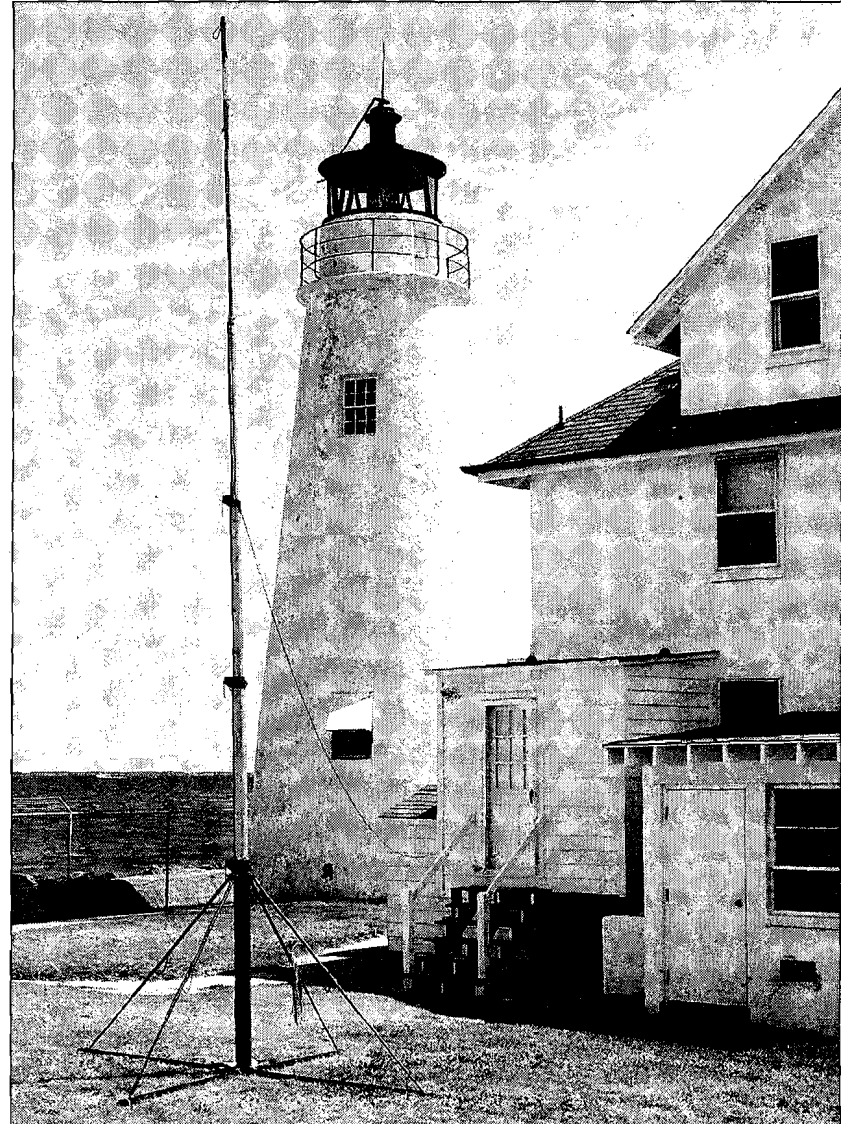
"Amateur radio signals are ours," Bowling said.

"We have reliable service without spending \$90 a month," Dickey said. "We're still available."

"... when everything else fails," said Steven Urquiza, treasurer for the CARA.

The radio bands are always operating, while cell phone service can be blocked by the government to allow only emergency signals to process in times of need.

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CARA

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The merit of amateur radio enthusiasts was recognized when they were included in an act to increase emergency response through Homeland Security. On Oct. 4, 2006, President Bush signed HR5441, a section of the Department of Homeland Security 2007 Appropriations Act, which formally includes amateur radio operators as a part of the emergency communications community, into law.

According to a press release featured on The National Association for Amateur Radio Web site, "Amateur Radio is included within the legislation's Subtitle D, Section 671, known as the '21st Century Emergency Communications Act.' Radio amateurs are among the entities with which a Regional Emergency Communications Coordination Working Group (RECC Working Group) must coordinate its activities. ... RECC Working Groups also will be tasked with ensuring a process to coordinate the establishment of 'effective multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency emergency communications networks' that could be brought into play following acts of terrorism, natural disasters and other emergencies."

Amateur radio goes beyond its extensive community service and is a very sociable endeavor for both men and women. In fact, 25 percent of the CARA is made up of women.

"It's a social thing. We're a fun bunch," Bowling said.

"The neat thing about radio ... if you're handi-

capped or just want to stay home [you can be involved]. It's not like bowling ... [it's a way] for them to stay in touch with the world even if they are mobility limited," Dickey said.

A lot of people are under the misconception that you have to know Morse code to be involved in amateur radio. This is untrue.

"You don't have to know Morse code to do it," Dickey said. "It appeals to people who have a musical bent."

He points out that Morse code skills can still be used if one so desires, and that some members have bounced transmissions off of meteor trails and the moon.

"Morse code goes a further distance than voice," Urquiza said.

Whatever the inclination, be it social or technical, it appeals to a broad range of the population.

"There are a lot of people involved in amateur radio," Dickey said.

This includes Walter Kronkite, Joe Walsh, many of the musicians on tour, astronauts in space, and many more.

"A lot of the entertainers got into it," Dickey said.

"[It's] international communication that allows friendship to develop across borders. Amateur radio is a unifier," Bowling said.

The CARA meets physically the first Thursday of every month, and meets over the air during the rest of the month. For more information, or to join the CARA, contact Dennis Bowling at 410-286-0810 or visit its Web site at www.k3cal.org.

E-mail Jonna Jones at jjones@somdnews.com.