



Amateur radio operator Glenn Tuttle stands by his radio tower in Punta Gorda Isles.

# LIVING THE HAM LIFE



SUN PHOTOS BY DANIEL SUTPHIN

In the past, it was necessary for amateur radio operators to learn Morse code. That is no longer the case for certification with the Federal Communications Commission.



Amateur radio operator David Boland works on his home rig in Burnt Store Isles.



Amateur radio operator Gary Skillicorn scans for broadcasts to listen in on.



Ham radio operator Ronnie Farley works with his repeater radio at his house in Punta Gorda Isles.

## Local radio operators offer 'safety net' in a digital world

By **DANIEL SUTPHIN**  
STAFF WRITER

Even as a kid, Glenn Tuttle knew he was a radio man.

"I was always interested in law enforcement. I used to listen to the local police department (radio scanner)," Tuttle said. "I think that was the beginning of my love affair with radios."

Tuttle, 68, is now a retired FBI agent living in Punta Gorda Isles, and amateur radio is much more than just a hobby for him and other

broadcasters like him who make up the ham community in Southwest Florida.

There are three amateur radio clubs in Charlotte County: the Peace River Radio Association, the Englewood Amateur Radio Society and the Charlotte Amateur Radio Club.

"This is the only hobby you can (pick up) when you're 8 years old and do it until your 98 ... or older," said Ronnie Farley, call sign KG4QIV and president of PRRA.

There are over 30 amateur radio clubs in Southwest Florida and

surrounding areas with almost 800 registered hams in the Federal Communications Commission database for Charlotte County, not including seasonal residents.

Hams are licensed and monitored by the FCC.

There are different classes of licenses for ham operators ranging from basic to expert. More advanced licenses allow for additional operating privileges such as more frequency bands and power. Each license

## HAM

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requires a written exam dealing with electronics, operating standards and federal regulations.

"When Charlotte County activates the Emergency Operations Center for a hurricane, amateur radio operators are called upon to man radios that connect our operations center with shelters, hospitals, and other EOCs," said Gerard Mallet, the county's emergency management director.

While the county uses many forms of communications — landline, cell, satellite phones and government radio systems — Mallet said amateur radio can fill the gap if those fail.

### Ham is a safety net of communications

"(Ham radio) is often our safety net of communications when all other services fail due to weather or other disasters," Tuttle said, who operates under the call name KPK.

Amateur radio, or ham radio, operators use a radio frequency spectrum for the non-commercial exchange of messages, wireless experimentation, self-training, private recreation, radio-sport, contesting and emergency communication.

"If communications were to shut down for any reason such as during a hurricane, then high frequency or other radio services would be what people relied on to communicate with the police, the fire department, the Red Cross, FEMA, etc.," Tuttle said. "I'm involved with a total different area — the marine safety angle and also the Department of Homeland Security SHARES program."

The SHARed RESources (SHARES) HF Radio program provides an additional way for users with a national security or emergency preparedness mission to communicate when landline and cellular communications are unavailable. Tuttle also represents the Seven Seas Cruising Association, which is "the largest and oldest association" of full-time sailors in the United States.

With his tower, Tuttle can operate on maritime high-frequency radio bands. These allow him to keep in touch with boats and ships around the world, especially in the Caribbean.

"We're like a radio lighthouse," Tuttle said. "Every day I speak to boats all throughout the Caribbean to take reports of security incidents and to keep the yachts apprised in the areas where trouble has been. The SSCA is in a partnership with the Caribbean Safety and Security Net, who monitors the safety and security of yachts in the Caribbean."

Glenn and his wife Eddie, 69, who is also a retired FBI agent, broadcast at the same time every morning on the same frequency and said he has had extensive media coverage regarding his broadcasts. They operate through a 68-foot antenna.

### Ham in case of emergency

"Let's say another Hurricane Charley comes in, then the amateur radio operators here can provide communications outside of the disaster area," said Tom Chance, 59, who is working with the Charlotte County Emergency Operations Center and other local amateur radio operators in the area to develop a program for emergency response.

Chance started working with amateur radio when he was 12. His call sign is K9XV.

"Counties want to be sure amateur operators are trained and can protect us. As time has moved on since 9-11, the training requirements have become more rigorous."

Some of that training involves working with FEMA and how they with the county operate during emergency situations.

"The other program is called CERT and that is how you handle a disaster situation," Chance said. "The more trained and more integrated within the emergency system you are, the better. Part of this is also security where they want people trained and certified as opposed to some radio amateur coming off the street."

### A lifetime hobby

Dave Boland, 80, lives in Burnt Store Isles and broadcasts as W9NWY. He also broadcasts as AFA4ZT as part of the U.S. Air Force Military Auxiliary Radio System program.

"I got my original ham license (KN0HZD) in April 1961 in Kirkwood, MO, when I was a freshman in college," Boland said. "Originally, (as MARS operators) we were involved more in health and welfare type messages, as well as assisting in disaster communications. Now, MARS is involved assisting Home Land Security and assisting DOD as requested."

MARS is a U.S. Department of Defense program established

## HAM CLUBS AROUND SW FLORIDA

### Charlotte:

Charlotte Amateur Radio Society  
Englewood Amateur Radio Society  
Peace River Radio Association

### Desoto:

DeSoto Amateur Radio Club

### Hardee:

Hardee ARES Radio Group

### HIGHLANDS:

Highlands County Amateur Radio

### HILLSBOROUGH:

American Victory Ship ARC  
Baycare Emergency Amateur Radio Service

Brandon Amateur Radio Society

Kings' Point Amateur Radio Club

Mid Florida DX assoc

Sheriff's Tactical Amateur Radio Communications

Sun City Amateur Radio Club

Tampa Amateur Radio Club

### MANATEE:

Bradenton Amateur Radio Club

Manatee Amateur Radio Club

### PASCO:

East Pasco Amateur Radio Society

Gulf Coast Amateur Radio Club

Suncoast Amateur Radio Club

Zephyrhills Area Amateur Radio Club

### PINELLAS:

Clearwater Amateur Radio Society

Honeywell Emergency Amateur Radio Team (H.E.A.R.T.)

St. Petersburg Amateur Radio Club

The Glorious Society of the Wormhole

Upper Pinellas Amateur Radio Club

### Polk:

Lakeland Amateur Radio Club

Lake Wales Repeater Association

### Sarasota:

Sarasota Amateur Radio Association

North Port Amateur Radio Club

Sarasota Emergency Radio Club

Tamiami Amateur Radio Club

to support military communications. It is managed and operated by the U.S. Army and the Air Force.

Boland has been licensed with the MARS program since 1965. He conducts daily "on-air training nets" twice a day. All traffic messages passed over the airways are encrypted so they can't be read by the general public.

To become a MARS member, you must first be a licensed amateur radio operator who has a radio that allows them to operate on specific frequencies. The applicant also needs to be able to operate on digital modes.

Boland's antenna is 50 feet tall. Under the U.S. Air Force MARS Region 4, Boland broadcasts in Alabama, Florida, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North and South Carolinas and Tennessee.

### Ham can lead to lasting friendships

Gary Skillicorn, 72, of Punta Gorda Isles, got the radio itch when he was 14. "I had a friend whose father was a ham."



SUN PHOTO BY DANIEL SUTPHIN

Amateur radio operator Eddie Tuttle shows on a map some recent transmissions with boaters in the Gulf of Mexico.

*We're like a radio lighthouse.*

As a hobby, operators often have conversations with other hams at a local level and places around the world as radio conditions allow.

"This might be a simple greeting or lengthy conversations over technical or any subject. It's a form of international goodwill and can lead to lasting friendships," Skillicorn said. "These 'conversations' might also be accomplished with Morse code or through a radio-to-computer interface."

### A special kind of club

Joining clubs like PRRA helps hams continue their education on amateur radio, according to Farley.

"Continuing education is of prime importance and networking is also important for us," Farley said. "The club forms a resource pool from which to draw upon during emergencies or to meet community needs."

"The clubs allow us to learn how to work together and bring equipment from various sources (mainly our homes and private gear), assemble the equipment and get it to work together as a (large) functioning unit. The people also get to practice working as a team and test the endurance of

both themselves and the equipment."

Farley said most emergency deployments, such as during hurricanes, will last several days to weeks. Operators must be mobile to cover the needs as they would change in an evolving emergency.

"Maybe your command center gets flooded and you need to pick up and move to another location," Farley said. "I feel that the clubs provide the glue that pulls together the amateur community and allows resources to be directed as needed."

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### RADIO FREE ENGLEWOOD ON THE AIR AGAIN

The Englewood Amateur Radio Club will demonstrate setup and operation of disaster recovery communications capability from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday at Lemon Bay Sunrise Rotary Park, 1000 S. McCall Road, Englewood.

The club will be demonstrate Two Meter Repeater and Simplex operation for local contacts, as well as High Frequency Single Sideband communications with the world.

The park, formerly known as Bay Heights park, is across from Gulf Coast Hardware.

For additional information, contact James Nelson, jim3nelson@yahoo.com, cell 727-742-6189.

## PUBLIC NOTICE CITY OF PUNTA GORDA COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT

All interested parties are hereby notified that the Punta Gorda Community Redevelopment Agency has filed with the State of Florida Auditor General's Office a copy of its Annual Status Report and Annual Financial Report highlighting projects, programs and CRA finances for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2018. Copies of these documents may be examined after March 29, 2019, in the Office of the City Clerk,

