

# Love for radio communication spawns Hamfest

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**SEVIERVILLE** — Though it has been around since before the internet redefined communication technology, amateur radio or “ham radio” remains a popular hobby for many.

Ham radio is the use of radio frequency spectrum for noncommercial exchange of messages. Radio amateurs use voice, text, image and data communications and have access to frequency allocations throughout the radio frequency spectrum. The communications go out across a city, region, country, continent, the world and into space without the use of the internet or cellular phones.

Sevier County Hamfest, set

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## HAMFEST

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for Saturday, March 30, will bring radio enthusiasts from all over the Southeast to the Sevier County Fairgrounds to share experiences in radio operations.

Hamfest committee spokesman Rick Sawaya has 40 years of experience in radio communication and says experienced radio operators delight in mentoring young radio amateurs.

“Part of the attraction in taking up the ham radio hobby is the ability to communicate with people all over the world,” Sawaya said. “We often hear of people who make friends on other continents through amateur radio.

“Many ham radio op-

erators use their devices as a way to learn about other cultures. It brings people together.”

The hobby can also provide a lifeline in a dire time of need.

In times of disaster, when regular communications channels fail, ham radios can assist emergency communications efforts and work with public service agencies. The National Association for Amateur Radio says there are more than 600,000 ham operators in the United States and more than 2 million worldwide.

In 2001, the Amateur Radio Service kept New York City emergency agencies in touch with each other after their command center was

destroyed during the Sept. 11 attacks. Hams, as they are known by hobbyists, were also present to boost communication during hurricanes Katrina and Harvey.

“Most get into the activity for the challenge and to meet new friends but hams have proven to be an extremely valuable tool in the event of a disaster,” Sawaya said. “Lives have been saved by skilled amateur radio operators acting quickly in emergency situations.”

Ham operators typically communicate with others using their voice and a microphone but texts and data can also be shared. Sawaya says some ham radio purists still use Morse code.

Federal Communica-

tions Commission officials have acknowledged the ability of the hobby to advance the communication and technical skills of radio and enhance international goodwill.

The Sevier County Amateur Radio Society holds numerous meetings and workshops throughout the year. The event has continued to grow, and Sawaya thinks this year will be its biggest year yet and expects to see more than 600 radio operators attend.

“It has blown up the last couple of years and we have seen more out of state ham users come for our Hamfest,” he said. “A lot of people make a long weekend out of it and spend time visiting the mountains while here.”