

Ham radio operators gather for Skywarn contest

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communications in emergencies. The 24-hour contest is co-sponsored by the American Radio Relay League and the National Weather Service and the radio operators work as a team to contact other hams across the world throughout the event.

Event coordinator David Floyd (N5DBZ) and Al Pietrycha (KB0ZXY) who work at the Goodland office presented a special recognition award and letter to Scott Mentzer (N0QE), meteorologist-in-charge at Goodland, as the originator of the program back in 1999.

Mentzer was surprised by the presentation of the plaque from the ARRL and a framed letter from John L. Hayes, national director of the National Weather Service in Washington, honoring Mentzer for his efforts in starting the national program.

Mentzer said he had no idea about the award and was truly pleased with the letter from the director of the National Weather Service.

Floyd said Mentzer's idea was to recognize the valuable contributions storm spotters make to the National Weather Service.

"Since many of the storm spotters were also hams," he said, "it seemed like a natural fit for the recognition to be centered on Amateur Radio."

Members of the radio clubs in Sherman County and Thomas County set up extra antennas and radios at the weather service office, and for most of the 24-hour contest, four different radio systems were making contacts around the country and the world.

Mentzer said he worked with a contact from Estonia in Eastern Europe and one from Australia.



Amy Floyd (KC0ZSF) worked the computer PSK system to make contact with other ham radio operators during the Skywarn Recognition Day Saturday at the National Weather Service office. Photo by Tom Betz/The Goodland Star-News

By the end of the day on Saturday, an unofficial total of 695 contacts had been logged at the Goodland weather office.

Floyd's 14-year old daughter, Amy (KC0ZSF) was one of the hams and she helped making contacts and keeping the log. She learned how to work the PSK (Phase Shift Keying), which is a digital form using a computer connected to a radio to make contacts and responded by typing the information on the computer keyboard.

The PSK rig was brought out by Goodland police officer Jimmy

Gillespie, and more than 100 contacts were made using the computer system.

Floyd said as SKYWARN Recognition Day has grown through the years, he has seen a greater use of digital communications, "Each year, more and more contacts are being made using EchoLink, Winlink and the use of e-mail reflectors."

Police Chief Ray Smee (KC0ZSM) said he had fun making contacts during the contest and that being a ham has become his hobby over the past several years.

At one point on Saturday, Smee

was making contacts almost continuously talking to stations in Washington, Oregon, California, British Columbia, Ohio and Nevada. Then he would make contact with a station starting with the WX call and search a list to see which of the more than 100 National Weather Service stations he had contacted such as the one in Charleston, S.C. or Louisville, Ky.

Listening to the contacts, it seemed a line of stations were waiting to make contact with Goodland, and Smee took down the information from each to add to the log.

He said the group was a bit disappointed they did not break the 700 contact level, but said those who participated had a good time. He said it was good to see Mentzer get special recognition for his efforts to start the program.

Smee said the last contact of the day was made by Gillespie with a station in Japan. He said last year the final contact of the contest was with a station in Siberia, Russia.

Mentzer said it was a great event, and for anyone interested, plans are being developed to hold classes in February for people who want to get an amateur radio operator license.

"We will have more details in the near future," he said, "and hope more people will join in the fun."

Floyd said feedback from the first event 10 years ago was "overwhelmingly positive" from both the weather service staff and the local ham clubs.

"Suddenly there was incentive for more weather service staffers to either obtain a license or upgrade so that more people could work ham

radio during severe events," he said. "In addition, many club members had never visited a weather service office before. When they came for the special event, they learned the value of their reports and how they were used in conjunction with existing technology."

The seed for Amateur Radio was planted in the 1890s, when Guglielmo Marconi began his experiments in wireless telegraphy said the ARRL web site. The United States government began licensing Amateur Radio operators in 1912.

By 1914, there were thousands of Amateur Radio operators — hams — in the United States. Hiram Percy Maxim, a leading Hartford, Conn., inventor and industrialist, saw the need for an organization to band together this fledgling group of radio experimenters. In May 1914 he founded the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) to meet that need.

Today ARRL, with approximately 155,000 members, is the largest organization of radio amateurs in the United States.

Survey finds citizens want to vote on at-large issue

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of the options under the second question, and two of those who voted No on the first question went ahead and marked "C" on the second question.

Linton said the committee held a public forum and a mock election on the issue of at-large voting of county commissioners.

He said the results of the mock election have been given to the county commissioners and will be given to the representatives in Topeka. He said nearly 80 percent of those voting on Nov. 4 were in favor of allowing Sherman County citizens an opportunity to vote on the commissioners at-large question.

A similar effort to allow Sherman

County citizens to decide the issue was killed in the Legislature when it appeared it had climbed over all the hurdles after two years of effort. Legislators on a conference committee said they killed the bill because of the confusion presented by two Sherman County Commissioners and they did not feel there had been enough public input to show support.

Linton said he did not know what the present commissioners would do with the results, but he hopes they would follow the wishes of the people and ask for the issue to be brought back before the legislature in January.

He told the city commissioners about the results at their meeting last Monday and invited them to

attend the meeting at the Elks on Tuesday.

Mayor Rick Billinger told Linton he wanted to thank the committee for all the work they have done on both the at-large and unification issues.

"There is a lot more work to be done," Linton said. "We will be back to talk to more people about the

unification. Possibly we would want to talk to the department supervisors to get their input."

Commissioner Josh Dechant asked what the next step was for the commissioner at-large question.

Linton said that will be up to the county commissioners as to how they want it presented.

Senior citizen dinner Wednesday

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Community Leaders of America. The National Honor Society, Girls Athletic Association and Family, Career and Community Leaders of America members are in charge of the dinner.

There will be door prizes including

five poinsettias and restaurant gift certificates, Short said. The school district purchased the prizes.

For some of the seniors, she said, this is about the only Christmas dinner they will get, and many of them come for the social aspect. People start coming at 10 a.m. so they can sit at their favorite spot.


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