

# Hams sharpen emergency help skills

By Amy Rosa  
staff writer

**E**VEN 104-DEGREE weather conditions couldn't keep the Farmington area's amateur radio operators from participating in Field Day '88 Saturday. It added to the challenge, some said.

Field Day is the annual event for amateur radio operators — also called Hams — to gather in groups simultaneously around the country to test emergency communications skills.

Farmington Amateur Radio Club (FARC) members set up an antenna, an electrical generator and radio equipment on the football field at North Farmington High School for the 24-hour event, which began Saturday afternoon.

Besides testing, the 25,000 Hams participating around the country competed in 15 different classes for the greatest number of national and international contacts combined.

FARC uses two transmitters, so it is categorized in class 2A, one of the smallest in the area.

**LEN NATHANSON**, one of FARC's 25 members who braved Saturday's heat, said by 6 p.m. he had already contacted 250 other operators. The Farmington Hills resident is director of the Great Lakes division of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL), the national organization for Ham operators.

"Our signal has been out to Colorado and California already. We'll talk to Hawaii before the day is over," he said.

"As the sun goes down, the ionosphere — outer layers of the Earth's atmosphere — carries amateur radio signals farther, similar to the phenomenon with AM radio, Nathanson said.

As each contact was made by the operators, either by Morse Code or voice communication, it was logged for the contest. The results won't be made available until May, when published in ARRL's official magazine, QST.

By dinnertime Saturday, two tents were set up on the field housing the radio equipment. From inside, calls, voice communications and static could be heard coming from the Hams and distant places.

"This is Whisky Eight Radio City," a Ham said, giving his call letters, W8RC, to another operator.

**ALTHOUGH IT** would be fun to win the contest for class 2A, Field Day's primary purpose is to demonstrate emergency preparedness, Nathanson said.

"We are interested in showing we can operate for 24 hours. We pass messages and it's kind of a practice."

In many emergencies, amateur radio operators are often credited with maintaining lifesaving contacts with governments, hospitals and the like, Nathanson said. The 1985 Mexican earthquake and U.S. invasion of Grenada are two examples he cited.

Because Hams use what can be expensive equipment, and are able to transmit many words per minute in Morse Code, many would call them professionals. But Nathanson said there's a big difference between professionals and what Hams do.

"We don't do it for a living," he said. "We don't make any money at it. We do it only as a public service."

**BUT MOST**, if not all, Hams do it for fun, too, said the Southfield lawyer, who has been doing Ham radio for 40 years.

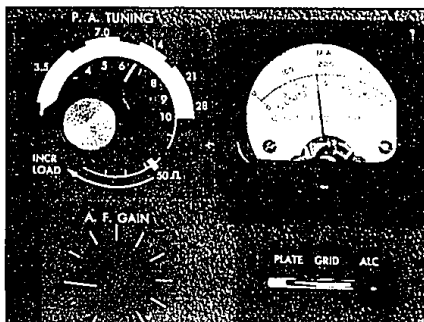
"Imagine being able to sit in your living room at home and talk to kings," he said, naming King Hussein of Jordan and the prince of Saudi Arabia as two of his many well-known contacts. Marlon Brando and Barry Goldwater also are Hams, he said.

Nathanson fell into the hobby from his electrical engineering background, he said. Now, as an area ARRL director, he travels to conventions and swapshops whenever he can.

"It has everything a great hobby should have," he said. "It has intellectual pursuits and the study of electrical phenomenon — and it's fun."



Leonard Nathanson of Farmington Hills uses Morse Code to communicate with an amateur radio operator in Illinois.



Farmington Hills resident Dick Painter took to the airwaves on a Ham radio sporting these controls. The American Radio Relay League's Field Day '88 was locally based on the football field at North Farmington High School. The Farmington Amateur Radio Club hosted it.



Ham radio operator Dick Painter of Farmington Hills takes to the airwaves during Field Day '88.

Staff photos by Thomas Arnett

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