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RADIO FIELD DAY

Hamming it up



Ham radio operators, from bottom, Bryan Smith, call-sign KD7JJH, Kraig Knapp, KD7JSN, and Dennis Simon, KB7UTV, participated in the Las Vegas Field Day sponsored by the Las Vegas Radio Amateur Club that was held June 28 at Sunset Park, 2601 E. Sunset Road.

VIC VALBUENA
BARENG/VIEW

Amateur operators participate in annual gathering at Sunset Park

By JESSICA TRIPP
SPECIAL TO VIEW

The word amateur may not inspire a vote of confidence, but in the case of amateur radio operators, or hams, the word is a misnomer. Hams turn to radio operation as a hobby, but they have been employed by government officials to help in disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and the tsunami overseas. On June 28, ham

operators from all over the Las Vegas Valley gathered in Sunset Park to participate in Field Day. On Field Day, sponsored by the American Radio Relay League, hams from all over the country got connected. "Ham radio, or what we are practicing this weekend, is the art of sustaining communications without the use of commercial power sources," said Tom Petrakis, president of the Las Vegas Radio Ama-

teur Club and a resident of southwest Las Vegas. "The principal or the primary purpose is to practice our hobby or our art, which is communicating. The other side of this is they add a context component." That component is related to emergency situations that have been happening all over the world. When cell phone towers are knocked out, the hams are called to bat. Field Day this year turned into a

test run for exactly that. "We'll set up different stations using Morse code, we have voice stations, and connect them by a wireless network, and we keep track of those contacts. It's become more like a contest over the years, but the roots of it are in emergency preparedness," said Arnold Zelig, one of the main coordinators of the event. ► SEE HAM PAGE 3AA



Peter Roberge from Nevada Amateur Radio Repeaters Inc. talks to another ham radio operator from Australia during the Las Vegas Field Day.

VIC VALBUENA BARENG/VIEW

► HAM: People study Morse code as hobby

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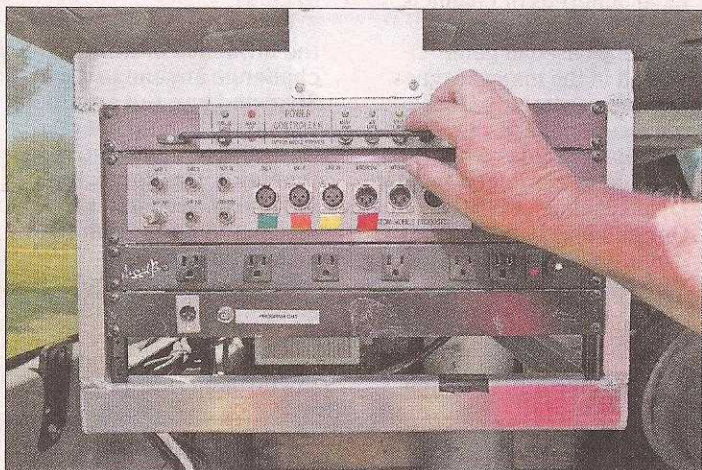
According to Zelig, while Morse code may be old, it is in no way outdated. When static makes voices difficult to hear over the radio, the insistent beeps of Morse code can cut right through. People all over the country study it as a hobby and in preparation for emergency use.

Newer technology also was brought into play at the event. IRLP is radio over the Internet, and it has its own advantages in an emergency.

"The IRLP system allows us to use the Internet to link with, so we can convert something (regular radio) that is only line of sight to talk all over the country," said Kent Johnson, president of the Nevada Amateur Radio Repeaters Inc. With the help and contributions of Peter Roberge, the NARRI had a station set up at Field Day and was able to contact people as far away as Australia and Japan.

Johnson has had some experience on what it is like to be called to help in an emergency. During Hurricane Katrina, he received a radio call from Baton Rouge, La., wanting to speak to someone in Denver. While no one in Denver answered, Johnson offered to relay the information via telephone. He was asked to order oxygen tanks and get them sent into the midst of the disaster.

One of the other important



Frank Kostelac, call-sign N7ZEV, works on the dials that control the air mast antenna of the electronic news gathering equipment.

VIC VALBUENA BARENG/VIEW

"This radio system is running off of solar panels ... where someone who was depending on AC power would be down and out."

KENT JOHNSON
PRESIDENT, NEVADA AMATEUR RADIO REPEATERS INC.

attributes of amateur radio operators is that they are able to operate even after the lights have gone out. They also are always prepared and incredibly mobile.

"This radio system is running off of solar panels. Some of the automobiles that have antennas on them can operate out of their automobiles or trucks," Johnson said. "They can communicate that way, where someone who was depending on AC power would be down and out."

Field Day may have been

just a one-day event, but the ham operators meet and practice their hobby year-round. They go through training courses to become efficient in all the necessary technology and often are called on by authorities.

The local club holds meetings at 7 p.m. on the third Tuesday of each month (except December) at the Salvation Army Building, 2900 Palomino Lane. To find out more about how to become an operator, visit www.lvrac.org.