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News

Field Day offers public good look -and listen -to the world of hams

By DAVID MOORE - *The Arab Tribune*
 Thursday, June 22, 2006 1:32 PM CDT

"CQ ... CQ..." In the parlance of amateur radio operators, or hams, that's the code for seeking a response, be it from someone on the other side of Marshall County or someone on the other side of the planet.

If you've ever had the hankering to broadcast that over a radio, then you can get your chance this Saturday and Sunday during the international Amateur Radio Field Day.

Members of the Brindlee Mountain Amateur Repeater Association will be set up behind the E-911 bunker (and Arab Fire Department) Saturday and Sunday and, as part of the international competition, will make radio contact with as many other ham operators as possible.

With a dozen or so Brindlee amateurs will be members of the Marshall County Alabama Repeater Systems and North Alabama Sand Mountain Club.

"If you have even remotely thought about becoming a ham radio operator, you can see what's going on," said Diane Walthall of Union Grove, who has been an amateur operator for 15 years. "Field Day is a good place to get on the radio - even if they don't have a license - and to see different radios."

She and her husband, Richard, will be giving tests for licenses in their motor home beginning at 10:30 a.m. Saturday. They said they take walk-ins, so no appointment is necessary.

Richard Walthall got his radio license 35 years ago. At the time, his dad, who had been a ham operator since 1915, was moving his boat from the Gulf up the Mississippi, Ohio and Tennessee rivers to Sheffield.

"He said if I would get a ham license I could keep up with his progress and come help if he needed it," Walthall said.

So he did that. His dad never needed the help, but afterward Walthall was hooked.

Now he and Diane use two-meter frequencies to radio people across the county. They use high frequencies to contact people across the country.

The Walthalls can use their two-meter gear with EchoLinc software to contact radio operators around the world.

"We were talking to someone in Australia the other week," Diane Walthall said.

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Online Poll

Law agencies spend extra time on roadblocks during holidays. Do they spend...

- Enough
- Not enough
- Too much

Stocks

Market Watch



Index	Last Trade	Change
NASDAQ	2111.84	11.59 ▲
SP 500	1248.00	6.80 ▲
Russ 2000	688.04	1.10 ▲
AMEX	1856.66	9.32 ▲
NYSE	7929.70	43.22 ▲
30 YR BOND	52.79	0.40 ▲

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Besides the fun of communicating and getting to know people like that, ham operators serve important functions, Richard Walthall said, especially when it comes to emergencies and storms.

"Sooner or later, there is going to be a disaster in Marshall County that is going to require our communications skills," he said. "All it takes is for a storm to tear down a few cell towers and repeaters..."

More often, the hams take training as storm spotters for the National Weather Service and serve as eyes, ears and radios on the ground across vast areas. Some operators, such as the Walthalls, are certified to go into the NWS center in Huntsville and work on the floor coordinating communications with the network of ham weather spotters.

"It can be interesting stuff - especially when the weather starts kicking up its heels," Walthall said.

Bill Clingon, president of the Brindlee club, went to Bay St. Louis after Hurricane Katrina to assist with emergency communications there, Walthall said.

There are more ham operators in Marshall County than outsiders might think. Walthall said they number between 250 and 280.

Field Day is sponsored by the Amateur Radio Relay League, a national organization dedicated to developing and promoting amateur radio communication skills.

Walthall said thousands of people across the country will be participating.

The Brindlee Mountain Amateur Repeater Association meets at 7 p.m. on the first Monday of each month at the Arab Recreation Center.

For more information on Field Day or the testing call: Clingon, 582-8592; Stan Hurst, 990-0851; or the Walthalls, 753-0029.

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