

President (MERT Coordinator) – Harlan Cook

- “The MERT Annual meeting will come to order. I thank everyone for participating today.”
- “The Documentation Manager will call the MERT Member attendance rollcall affirming who is present.

Secretary (MERT Documentation Manager) - Cindy Sheffield

- Calls each name on the Members list to determine if present. The rollcall is noted if present.
- “Mr. President, roll call has been taken and noted for the record with a copy to be attached to the minutes”

President (MERT Coordinator) – Harlan Cook

- Thank you Cindy. (Documentation Manager)
- “The minutes of MERT’s last Annual meeting were available at the login station. Are there any corrections to the minutes?”
- “If there are no corrections, the minutes are approved as distributed.”
- “If there is no objection, the Documentation Manager will note the minutes approved.

OR – “If there are no further corrections, the minutes are approved as corrected.”

For the record:

From the Marion County Sheriff’s Office, MERT Standard Operating Guidelines, revised dated July 2022:

- The Marion County Emergency Radio Communications Team (MERT) consists of volunteers with the interest to help their community during times of disaster. The MERT program takes on trained certified communications operators, licensed by FCC and trains them for use during events and incidents within Marion County.
- “Located at the Login station was a listing of MERT’s major accomplishments and activities for 2025 that our Documentation Manager completed. I want to thank her for creating the detailed list for the records. It was an incredible year of achievements that I want to thank all MERT members and the Friends of MERT for achieving. The document will be included in the official record of the 2026 Annual Meeting.”
- “This meeting is being conducted to comply with the ARRL Rules for Affiliated Clubs requiring an Annual Report to be filed.”
- “At the direction of the Division of Emergency Management, the Secretary’s position was changed to Documentation Manager and filled by Cindy Sheffield. I sincerely thank her for taking on this position.”
- “The next Annual Meeting will be held on January 16th, 2027.”
- “Is there is any further business for the meeting?”
- “Hearing none, a motion to adjourn is in order.”
- “There is a motion to adjourn. All in favor say AYE.”
- “The AYES have it and the meeting is adjourned at 10:19.”

I hereby certify that the above minutes are true and accurate as conducted and documented today.



Cindy Sheffield

Documentation Manager

Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT)

January 17, 2026

Date

January:

- Phil Lewis conducted troubleshooting and uploading of the new icon programs over the holidays
- The first draft of setting up audits in March for the shelters was prepared .
- We also established a goal for this coming year is to expand our knowledge of HF emergency communication operations.
- Updating the standard operating guidelines (SOG) was assigned to Bill Sobel, Ray Woody, and Cindy Sheffield.
- At the January monthly meeting the annual report for 2024 was presented by Harlan Cook MERT DIRECTOR.
- The first draft of the annual activity report for 2025 was presented.
- Hayden Kaufman ARES COORDINATOR, gave an update on Aries activities for 2024
- Dave Welker HOSPITAL EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION COORDINATOR, gave an update on their activities for 2024
- Nick Kidney discussed HOA approval of flagpole antenna updates.
- Randy Williams CERT LIAISON presented an update on their activities for 2024.
- Preston Bowlin was given a copy of the current 2023-2024 standard operating guidelines for Merch and informed that they were being updated for 2025 2026; he was given a copy of the highlights for activities from MERT for 2024; he was also presented with the MERT 2025 annual activity calendar.
- Gary Neron gave an update on the scheduled shelter audits in mid-march; and provided a discussion on the schedule for MERT 20 in April or May of 2025

FEBRUARY:

- Ray Woody, head of the committee for the MERT SHELTER TESTING PLAN AND CHECKLIST
- Submitted the following forms for the proposed 2025 School shelter audit they are as follows; MERT shelter information list; proposed testing schedule; proposed testing teams; proposed shelter audit checklist; radio test plan and Google Earth shelter overhead views of the shelters we will use.
- It was further suggested by the committee that each shelter School ensure that the room has a minimum of a table and two chairs and that the space not be used for storage.
- MERT welcomed a new member whose name is Debby Leflar.
- Harlan presented the following updates; on February 4th Gary Nichols will attend the Auxcom class; February 5th the national weather service Skywarn spider class will be taught; on February 7th through 9th is the Orlando HAMcation; February 15th will be the Florida youth ranch rodeo fundraiser.
- On February 8th our longtime friend and excellent member Billy Davis passed away. Billy was a very active member and was always there ready to help with any project that was needed. A Silent Key Ceremony was conducted in his honor during the MERT Weekly Training NET with all members.
- On February 18th the standard operating guidelines (SOG) for MERT 2026 were presented. Additionally the shelter audit report was presented.
- On February 26th the participation in the Florida division of emergency Management exercises regions 3, 4 and 5 were discussed. Insert photos of f d e m regions 3, 4 and 5 monthly income exercise here.

MARCH:

- On March 3rd we discussed the status of the Forest high School shelter.
- On March 7th we saluted female MERT members; PAT DAVIS, DENISE EADES, SHARON MALIK, CHRISTIE NICHOLS, DEE SEAGRAVES, CINDY SHEFFIELD, KIM SHULBY. HARLAN also provided historical perspective on the earliest known female amateur radio operators. They were Carrie Bain and

Eleanor Agnes McLeod. Other modern trailblazers included Vera Furbin, Carol Percy, and Valerie Holtz.

- On March 12th we conducted shelter evaluations and Shrek testing.
- On Saturday March 16th a meeting of MERT, CERT, HEC, AND ARES EMCOM TEAMS met, following speakers providing information for this meeting. Ray Woody reviewed the 2025 shelter testing plan set for March 18th and 19th; Dave Welker provided an overview of the 214 heck drill exercise; Hayden Kaufman reviewed the 2025 Florida Auxcomm exercise scheduled for April 12th 9:00 a.m. to noon; Harlan Cook provided a review of the rig expert match cable antenna adapter
- On March 16th we received the latest member roster for MERT. RAY WOODY provided antenna directions to each EOC and repeaters CLL and DFC, he also provided mileage as the crow flies from each shelter to the CLL and DFC antennas GARY NICKOLS provided photos of the best shelter locations for Handy talky use if needed.
- On March 24th the OCF HF antenna transformer will be moved from the old pole over to the new 30 ft. high strength hurricane rated pole.
- **HOT WASH** time. Participating members will provide a deep dive into the results of the school shelter tests last week. There were some surprising results. We will discuss the results, possible causes and then next steps necessary on bringing every shelter to maximum capability.

- **Shelter Test Report**

- Our activities were spearheaded by our new Shelter Manager, Ray Woody (WB6FKJ) who did a fantastic job in planning, organizing and overseeing the Testing Summary (Does not include all test results and findings.)
- ➤ Forest High School – Not Operational – Cable/antenna tests failed
- ➤ West Port High School – Not Supportable - MERT systems functional but roof leak creating electrocution hazard
- ➤ KG4NXO repeater (70 cm) – County wide reception not possible after Sheriff Tower rehab in late-2024
- ➤ School Wi-Fi Access – MCPS blocking access for Winlink digital message communications as the antenna and cabling systems are approx. 15-years old, these annual tests become more important to complete and we thank the Marion County School District for their support allowing our testing. We also look forward to working with the school district in addressing this years' findings to bring all shelters up to operational and supportable status. Our thanks also to the Division of Emergency Management Director and staff for their support.

- **Repeater KK4DFC Upgraded!**

We have wonderful news from Phil Lewis (**our new D-Star Repeater Manager**) that he has successfully upgraded from the 20-year-old Gen. 1 repeater and 10-year-old PC to a new ICOM Gen. 3 model and newbPC. Both pieces of new hardware were provided with Director Preston Bowlin's major support by the Division of Emergency Management. Another part of the "upgrade challenge" was a completely new Operating Software (OS) upgrade which had some "kinks" requiring time to work out. KK4DFC (146.790 MHz) is the primary MERT repeater dedicated to supporting all shelter operations throughout Marion County and is located at the Baseline Transfer Station with the antenna at 300 feet AGL.

APRIL:

- **MERT thanks these individuals for their very interesting presentations at the March meeting:**
Hayden Kaufman - 2025 Florida AUXCOMM Exercise
Gary Nicholas - 2025 Hospital Emergency Team Exercise
AUXCOMM Training Class Update

Ray Woody - 2025 Shelter Test Activities & Plan

- **On April 7th We are having a West Marion County Field Day Exercise beginning at 9:00 am. It will be held at Royce Hagerman's home.** Address is: 1399 NW Mandrake Drive; Dunnellon Directions attached. (All hams are invited to participate). Members will be testing communications from the far western extremes close to the County limits approx. 21 miles west of the Courthouse and less than a mile from the Marion County line. ***Harlan this would be a good place to insert that picture you have from the field day.***
- **On Saturday, April 12th from 9 to 12 noon, everyone is invited to participate in the State-wide ECOMM Exercise.**
This year's introduction... "Florida is under siege as a Cyberstorm unfolds as a devastating outbreak of tornadoes wreaks havoc across the state, crippling infrastructure and overwhelming emergency services." MERT supports your participation from your home station or at the EOC. For MERT members participating consider yourself a Shelter Operator and be prepared to respond to all conditions and events as such during the Exercise.
- **APRIL 19th CERT County-wide Training Drill.** MERT is looking for 5 members to volunteer in providing radio support services to the 4 CERT Teams and as the MERT IC in the EOC on Saturday, April 19th from 8 am till 1 PM. MERT operators will be embedded with each team and assist them with reporting events and activities as they would do at their own communities during a county-wide activation. **A very Special Thanks:** To the following volunteers who supported the **CERT Countywide Drill** at the EOC on Saturday. Bill Gillespie, Nick Kiddey, Cindy Sheffield, Sharon Malik and ARES Coordinator Hayden Kaufman.
- **April 23rd Skwarn class at the EOC from 6 – 8 PM.** The class is free.
- **Silent Key Acknowledgement for William "Bill" Davis (KQ4ILZ) 1945 – 2025.**

May:

- **May 6th MERT requests the following Internet service connections at the Baseline Landfill and Sheriff Tower communications facilities for its new D-Star repeaters. From Mr. Preston Bowlin.**
- With your support and encouragement, MERT has been charged to operate and maintain an emergency communications (EMCOMM) system with reliable, continuous, and non-interrupted communications capability. Over the past 5-years, MERT has made significant upgrades and enhancements in making the networks we operate more robust, resilient, and add redundancy. This investment by the Division of Emergency Management has resulted in our systems being better able to withstand disruptions and maintain operational connectivity, even when some components fail. This includes the direct communications with the Federal government via the SHARES network we added in 2023. One major step in the above effort was the replacement of two (2) repeaters which are 17-years old. While a D-STAR repeater can operate independently and just cover Marion County, D-Star repeaters connected to the Internet allow MERT operators to access **other Florida and the U.S.** networks at EOC's for passing and receiving emergency communications (EMCOMM) information. For D-STAR repeaters, a reliable and high-speed Internet connection now requires 100Mb/s symmetrical bandwidth since it's crucial for connecting to these radio networks for wider communications. Additionally, to use the full services of the D-Star system the Marion County Sheriff's Office Division of Emergency Management purchased and has used since 2008, the router port details (provided above) are also critically important to provide MERT the fullest capabilities in our responsibility to provide reliable and continuous ECOMM operational service.
- **Friday, May 9th** met with the Forest High School MCPS staff to investigate and identify what repairs are necessary to the MERT radio outlet that was moved without approval.

The work party will conduct inspections and multiple tests including SWR, fault/distance location, resistance testing and radio comm's to assist the MCPS staff in their correction efforts. Work may include accessing the ceiling crawl space, roof and outdoor ladder work at the antenna.

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- **Major updates to the Shelter Support Team Reference Manual were performed.** Thanks to **Ray Woody** (WB6FKJ), Shelter Manager, for leading this effort. Ray has also made excellent progress on his new Shelter Master Reference document which is a major NEW RESOURCE for MERT into the future.
- Our D-Star Manager, **Phil Lewis** (W4EVV), is finalizing the upgrade of the KK4DFC D-Star repeater, to bring these Generation-3 Repeaters online.
- We also want to acknowledge **Bill Gillespie** (KW5BG), Deputy Coordinator, for his research into Station #6 radio. The good news is the radio and antenna systems are in great operating condition! More good news from **Bill Gillespie** is the SWR checks on the OCF antenna (HF long distance communications) was good too! He reports that the test results showed between 1.5 - 1.6 SWR across all HF bands. This confirms the water discovered inside the housing did not damage the antenna balun. This is excellent news for MERT and our readiness for the 2025 Hurricane season.

June :

- **No deployments this month**
- **Repeater KG4NXO has been Upgraded!**
- In the last newsletter, we shared news that the KK4DFC repeater had been upgraded after a major effort and much time. Further ,Phil Lewis (D-Star Repeater Manager) successfully upgraded our second D-Star repeater for KG4NXO.
- **EOC Tower Update**

The new 30 ft high, hurricane rated lift tower supporting the Off-Center Fed (OCF) antenna at the EOC has been installed. The new tower uses a pulley system allowing access to the antenna balun should maintenance or replacements be required. It also has the ability for MERT to add additional HF antennas in the future. The tower/antenna/ paracord system will be completed soon when the additional "flagpole rings" holding the cables in place are delivered to Phil Lewis (WB4EVV) D-Star Repeater Manager. Finally, the New KK4DFC repeater and PC have been installed at Baseline.

- **Programming changes to the MERT Baofeng Handy Talkie's channel listings.** Have been made by Bill Gillespie (KW5BG), Deputy Coordinator. will be programming changes matching the ICS-205 SHREK radio plan, to the **MERT** Baofeng Handy Talkie's channel listings.
- Work day involved the following: A) Researching why the CHIRP software is not correctly loading Bill & volunteers will determine why CHIRP softly will not load the new KISS program into the Shelter Operator HT's.
 - B)** A photo document and an inventory list (model, S/N, Description, etc).
 - C)** The new MCC Go Kit hardware (including the SHARES band modifications) will be activated and fully tested.
 - D)** Another is to analyze and recommend where we can add another HF antenna(s) at the EOC for **SHARES** operations on 40 & 80 Meters.
 - E)** An inventory and photograph record will be made of old/non-working MERT equipment in order to request that it be removed from the Sheriff's Office inventory lists. We will dispose of it when approved.
 - F)** The new 2 Meter duplexer (145.310/144.710) will be moved to the warehouse in a SAFE spot until it is moved to the Forest Tower for activation
- Significant revisions to the Shelter Manual and adding the new Shelter Support Team Resource Manual. MERT
- has never been better prepared. A huge Thank You to Ray Woody (WB6FKJ), Shelter Manager for his major commitment to collect, update, catalog and publish this new comprehensive resource for MERT.

JULY:

- No Deployments this month
- KK4DFC gateway is back on line thanks to Phil Lewis
- Forest High School now has a functioning antenna and cable connectors to the radio room in the school.
- West Port High School the roof has been fixed so it is safe to work in the Radio room located at the school

AUGUST:

- No Deployments this month
- Ocala Forest repeater went active on August 1st coverage tests were very favorable preliminary tests included Alachua and Sumter County EOCs
- Kraig Pritts donated an all band Yaesu FT-891 to MERT. The radio will be used as a backup for our SHARE radio unit at the Radio room in the EOC
- Radio room layout changes were made as follows: station 1 and station 2 (with new radio) will be dedicated to providing EOC to EOC communications.
- Inter-county AUXCOMM meeting was held on August 12th at the Marion County EOC 11 counties were included and 36 people attended the major goal was the development of a coast to coast voice and digital message radio system between EOCs

SEPTEMBER:

- Held Salt Springs Field Day with the following results: Winlink digital messaging was not operating at this time
- MCT and the new Ocala Forest Antenna allowed 14 of 20 transmissions from the Northeast district office to the Marion County EOC. This increased MERT's EMCOMM services to Marion County as well as the entire Ocala National Forest area
- Brett Wallace was the special guest speaker at the monthly meeting. He discussed increased cooperation of EOC AUXCOMM communications.

- MERT Radio room was reconfigured and documented in a diagram
- Phil Lewis discussed plans to update the repeater voice announcement.

OCTOBER:

- A new member recruitment event was held at Stone Creek Community Fall festival
- All HTs were recharged and reprogrammed to match the new ICS-205 communication plan
- The Radio room station one was reprogrammed by Hayden Kaufman and Santos Pagan to serve as the SHARES alert messaging system
- A new Shelter Operations Manual was developed by a group led by Ray Woody this will be added to the SHREK kit
- SHREK kids were updated with additional equipment
- Radio room stations one and two have new DC power cables and Anderson power poles added
- The outside lift Pole was updated to support pole ring lines
- North Florida AUXCOMM meeting was held at Lake County EOC and was a great success. It was determined that the next meeting would be held at the Flagler County EOC. Further, numerous goals were established. They included: A list of regional resources and networks used by all AUXCOMM teams be prepared; Development of common EMCOMM procedures were begun ; Regular EOC Network tests to verify intra-EOC communications

NOVEMBER:

- New 2026 MERT executive leaders were announced:
- SHELTER MANAGER - RAY WOODY
- DEPUTY SHELTER MANAGER - SANTOS PAGAN
- NEW MEMBER MANAGER - NICK KIDDEY
- WEBSITE MANAGER - GARY NICHOLAS
- LOGISTICS MANAGER - ROYCE HAGEMAN
- DEPUTY LOGISTICS MANAGER - CINDY SHEFFIELD
- CERT LIAISON – KRAIG PRITTS
- HEC LIAISON – BRUCE TWISS
- MARION BAPTIST ASSOCIATION RELIEF LIAISON - MARK WEIBLE

DECEMBER:

- New 2026 Initiative – Improving our Technical Reference Resources
 - Technical Library plans reviewed – Includes:
 - Radio Room Station 1 – 8 detailed documentation planned
 - All MERT equipment sites to have all equipment documented and detailed technical manuals researched and included in Library