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Amateur Radio

<http://www.cq-amateur-radio.com>

COMMUNICATIONS & TECHNOLOGY

JANUARY 2012

CQ

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Digital Edition-
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On the Cover:
Jamie Droddy, KI4TXZ,
and Thor Wilson, KI4TXV,
with a model of the
Aubiesat-1 satellite.
See story on page 13
and details on page 4.

Arkansas SKYWARN® Lessons in Social Graces:

How One EmComm Organization is Embracing the Web for the Greater Good

The stampede of internet social networking and streaming audio and video sites, and increasingly reliable cell phone coverage, offers radio amateurs two choices: Either jump on for the ride or get trampled. This inconvenient truth—to steal a phrase from both a documentary and a former vice president—is no more evident than in emergency communications.

"When all else fails, amateur radio," loses some of its zing when all else *doesn't fail*. That's happening more and more. It's a good thing. Better technologies and contingencies in the private commercial sector are keeping cell and internet systems in the game longer and better, even when disaster strikes.

Does this minimize the need for amateur radio's EmComm readiness? *Absolutely not*. If anything, it underscores the need for hams to stay in that discomfort zone, fight complacency, and be trained and ready *when*—not *if*—all other emergency communications go *kablooey*.

Here's one organization that has recognized the internet's social networking and live streaming value and is using it to strengthen amateur radio's position as the best, most reliable and efficient emergency communicators on the planet. It's Arkansas SKYWARN®.

A loving embrace of new technologies and communications channels by this forward-looking organization is making a solid organization of radio amateurs even better and provides a lesson for us all.

And So It Began . . .

Danny Straessle, KE5WLR, reports from Little Rock that during its September 2011 training net session, "Arkansas SKYWARN® announced an expanded Internet presence for the organization."

The organization has recognized the value of the Web and social media and, as you'll see, is jumping in with both feet.

"Through a combination of traditional internet resources and the newer social media utilities," he said, "Arkansas SKYWARN® is providing an opportunity for certified amateur radio storm spotters to interact off-air in a non-net environment."

On the Web

"Arkansas SKYWARN® is in the process of building a new website that will serve as a resource for



Photo A— Quick links to Arkansas SKYWARN's® Facebook, Twitter, and live RadioReference.com streaming audio sites are lined-up across the bottom of the organization's website: <<http://www.arkskywarn.org>> (Internet screen grab)

safe storm-spotting best practices and will exist as *the place* where ... spotters in Arkansas can reference training material throughout the year." (See photo A.)

Straessle noted that "while severe weather can occur during any month on the calendar, the new website will be particularly useful for training online in the typical off-season. Look for the new site to come online before the 2012 spring storms arrive."

For updates and additional information, check: <<http://www.arkskywarn.org>>.

On Facebook

A Facebook page designed for certified amateur radio operator storm spotters to share their "severe weather event experiences, photos, and videos" with others who are interested in storm spotting, including non-amateur radio operators, has been established by Arkansas SKYWARN®, as well (see photo B).

Straessle stressed the Facebook page "is not intended for submitting storm reports to the National Weather Service. It's a conversation about storm spotting in which everyone is eager to hear your story. Where did you deploy? What did you see? What did you report or not report and why?"

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Photo B— A Facebook page has been designed by Arkansas SKYWARN® for spotters to share their “severe weather event experiences, photos and videos” with others who are interested in storm spotting. See: <<http://www.facebook.com/arkskywarn>>. (Internet screen grab)



These and many other questions “demand answers,” Straessle writes, “and your willingness to share the experience will contribute to a body of knowledge that ultimately will benefit the training of others.”

“Everyone is invited to participate in weather discussions, including events that happen outside the state of Arkansas,” KE5WLR said. “Posts/topics are limited to weather, storm spotting best practices, the National Weather Service—and all of the agency’s products—and amateur radio. All off-topic posts will be deleted.”

By the way, a Facebook account is *not required* to view these discussions. Visit: <<http://www.facebook.com/arkskywarn>>, and get in on the conversation, he commented.

Twitter

In response to a request from amateur radio operators who “want to be notified when Arkansas SKYWARN® has been

activated by the National Weather Service Little Rock Forecast Office, a Twitter feed has been established to communicate such information off-air,” Straessle said (see photo C).

“Both the Facebook fan page and the Twitter feed have been linked so that end-users can also be notified when the conversation expands and new information has been posted,” he added.

A Twitter account is *not required* to view the feed. “Follow Arkansas SKYWARN® at <<http://www.twitter.com/arkskywarn>> and find out how you, too, can be notified when you don’t have access to a radio or scanner,” KE5WLR said.



Photo C— Hams who “want to be notified when Arkansas SKYWARN® has been activated by the National Weather Service Little Rock Forecast Office,” are invited to sign up for a Twitter feed. . . . “to communicate such information off-air,” KE5WLR said. Visit: <<http://www.twitter.com/arkskywarn>>. (Internet screen grab)

Live Streaming Audio Feed

For more than a year, amateur radio operators and the public-at-large have been able to monitor Arkansas SKYWARN® via the internet through a live audio feed provided by the Central Arkansas Radio Emergency Net (CAREN Club) on RadioReference.com (see <<http://www.RadioReference.com>> and photo D).

“The streaming audio feed meets a high demand for monitoring Arkansas SKYWARN® from those who cannot do so at any given time with a receiver,” KE5WLR said. “People who spend most of their day in an office or are perhaps traveling outside Arkansas for an extended period of time have been able to monitor rapidly changing weather conditions by listening to the net on their computers or smart phones and other devices.” To listen live, visit: <<http://www.arkskywarn.org>>.

When on the link, you’ll be hearing the W5DI repeater in Little Rock on 146.940 Mhz.

Arkansas SKYWARN’s® Word to the Wise

“These expanded Internet presence and social media interactive opportunities are designed only to supplement the training mission of Arkansas SKYWARN®,” the organization warns, “and should not be relied upon as a replacement for monitoring amateur radio frequencies and NOAA Weather

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Radio. Stations with reportable criteria should pass traffic directly to an Arkansas SKYWARN® net control operator or the National Weather Service."

The Foundation on Which They Build

By way of history, the Arkansas Weather Net was incorporated as a non-profit amateur radio organization in the late 1960s to "provide real-time field reports to the National Weather Service in Little Rock (then located at Adams Field) during significant weather events.

"Nets were conducted over what was then the new 2-meter FM repeater operating on 146.940 MHz, constructed by the Central Arkansas Radio Emergency Net (CAREN Club)," the organization explained.

"A few years later, in the early 1970s, the NWS rolled out its official SKYWARN® program, which collects field reports from volunteer weather spotters to aid forecasters in issuing and verifying severe weather watches and warnings," Arkansas SKYWARN® reported. "It was then (that the) Arkansas Weather Net began operating under the trade name of Arkansas SKYWARN®," and is sponsored by Arkansas Weather Net,

Inc., and operated under the authority of the National Weather Service."

When severe weather threatens, the NWS is the sole authority for making a determination as to whether Arkansas SKYWARN® is activated.

(IN DEPTH: For complete information about SKYWARN® and how to become a severe weather spotter, visit: <<http://skywarn.org/>>. —ed.)

Share Your Group's Innovative Ideas with CQ Readers

Is your group or organization using social networking, the Internet or cell phone technologies to enhance emergency communications or training? We'd like to hear from you.

Please drop an email to: <ki6sn@cq-amateur-radio.com>, or write to: Richard Fisher, KI6SN, CQ Public Service, CQ Communications, Inc., 25 Newbridge Rd., Hicksville, NY 11801. We'll share your innovative ideas and initiatives with other CQ readers.

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Photo D— Arkansas SKYWARN's® streaming audio feed "meets a high demand for monitoring . . . from those who cannot do so at any given time with a receiver," KE5WLR said. To hear the W5DI Little Rock 146.940 MHz repeater, visit: <http://www.arkskywarn.org>. (Internet screen grab)

munications support during the Occoneechee Speedway's Fifth Annual Car Show and Racers' Reunion in November 2011 at Hillsborough, North Carolina.

"This was the second year in which (OCRA) had a presence there, which features 50 years' worth of classic automobiles and race cars," writes Woody Woodward, K3VSA. "Some came com-

plete with their original vintage race drivers. Once again, Lad Carrington, W4ORD, led the group providing emergency communication and representing amateur radio at the event." (See photos E and F.)

The Occoneechee Speedway at Hillsborough "dates back to the 1948 inauguration of NASCAR and is the last remaining of the famous Southern her-

itage 'dirt tracks,'" Woodward said. (IN DEPTH: For more information about the history of Occoneechee Speedway at Hillsborough, visit: <http://www.historicspeedwaygroup.org/>.—ed.)

"W4ORD manned a booth promoting ham radio and providing emergency communication support through OCRA's W4UNC 442.150-MHz repeater. Other OCRA members and associates who assisted or attended included: Dee Ramm, KU4GC; Karl Ramm, N1XPB; Lenore Ramm, KF4PAB; Vic Merryman, K0OUX; Dewey Thompson, WA4AHR; me; and my daughter, Michaela," K3VSA said. (For more information about OCRA, visit: <http://ncocra.org/>.—ed.)

"Fortunately for all concerned, no emergencies occurred, so our participation consisted of being prepared for action and showing the flag for amateur radio," Woodward said.

(WATCH: A video of what Occoneechee Speedway looks like today and to hear reminiscences of those who were there in its heyday: <http://bit.ly/sjRbHM>.—ed.)

For this month, 73, Richard, K16SN



Photo E— Lad Carrington, W4ORD, gives a short tutorial on amateur radio to Miss Occoneechee/Orange Speedway 2011 Michelle Montgomery during the Fifth Annual Car Show and Racers' Reunion in November 2011. (Courtesy of K3VSA)



Photo F— Paint and chrome from a classic 1955 Chevrolet gleam in the sunshine at the 2011 Occoneechee Speedway Fifth Annual Car Show and Racers' Reunion, where seven members of Orange County Radio Amateurs provided communications support. (Courtesy of K3VSA)