



Amateur radio enthusiasts turn out for 2010 Hamfest

By SONIA FERNANDEZ, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

August 15, 2010 8:02 AM

Amateur radio enthusiasts of all varieties showed up at the Earl Warren Showgrounds Saturday morning for the 2010 Hamfest. The local section of the American Radio Relay League's annual get-together was presented by the Santa Barbara Amateur Radio Club

"This has been going on for about 30 years," said SBARC Executive Vice President Michael Ditmore. It was also the 90th anniversary of SBARC. Aside from just getting people together, swapping stories and enjoying the barbecue, the purpose of the Hamfest was to boost the importance and presence of amateur radio as a vital part of emergency communications, he said. Mobile communications centers were available for people to tour, an amateur television workshop was offered and vendors brought out their wares, from the top of the line latest in amateur radio, to people offering miscellaneous parts and gadgets to help their fellow hams create just the right radio. To the untrained eye, the boxes of cables and radio parts could look like junk, but to the experienced ham operator, these were gold.



Bruce Gordon of ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Service) and of the Santa Barbara Amateur Radio Club talks with another radio enthusiast about transmitting digital images via radio wave inside of the SBARC Mobile Communications Van.

"These guys are junk junkies," Mr. Ditmore quipped. Indeed, a major part of an amateur radio operator's repertoire is the ability to cobble together a unit to fit the location and circumstances. According to Mr. Ditmore, the first form of communication that came out of Santa Barbara after the devastating 1925 earthquake was an amateur radio, put together by a local ham.

"He set up a card table in the middle of State Street amidst all the rubble, built a transmitter and transmitted a signal," he said. One major SBARC goal is to train local radio operators to be effective in instances when fires or earthquakes or floods knock out electricity, as well as TV, cellphone and internet access, leaving radio communications as the only option.

It's ham radio's relatively easy technology and low power requirements that made it part of the package that local Goleta company Life Cube, Inc. is offering. The creators of a new inflatable emergency shelter/center of operations, the Life Cube is meant to be deployed in a variety of circumstances, with options to outfit the airframe shelter with a solar panel that can feed the battery that powers the radio. "This is all about survival," said Marketing Manager Jessica Sampson



Taking visitors way back on a tour of ham radio throughout history was Michael Brennan, with an array of radios that spanned

The Life Cube is shown set up next to a folded version of the same structure at the 2010 Hamfest event. Below, the radio unit inside the cube is shown. The cube is manufactured by a Goleta company.



Alex Sotnik and his daughter Ashley try out some of the old military radios owned by Michael Brennan.

the World War II, Vietnam, Korea and even Desert Storm conflicts. One thing that stands out is the major reduction of bulk in the gear: backpack-type units in the older wars to smaller handhelds for the newer ones. "That's a portable," he said pointing to a unit that weighed at least 12 to 15 pounds, without the accessories."

The Hamfest was also a place where future uses and possibilities of relatively old technology was explored. Several speakers were on hand to talk about radio technology and its applications.

One prominent application is in the technology used at the Las Cumbres Observatory Global Telescope Network, a non-profit started by computer engineer Wayne Rosing to watch the night sky from several vantage points around the world.

While the more high-tech uses of radio technology may take some of the work out of the hands of the do-it-yourselfers, it was clear that the amateur part of amateur radio is still alive and well.

"It's kind of like cars these days, where some parts are so complicated you can't fix it yourself, but for the most part the amateurs have embraced the new stuff, while they've also held on to the old," said Mr. Ditmore.