

# Amateur radio: Today's unsung public service

6/21/2006 10:34:04 AM

Itawamba



(PHOTO: The Times/ADAM ARMOUR

Amateur radio operator Jeff Clingan gives out a call on his ham radio, located in the Emergency Management Agency office in Fulton. Amateur radio operators are unsung heroes during severe weather and other emergency situations, remaining in constant contact with one another when all other communications have failed. - photo by Adam Armour)

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Communication has changed significantly during the past century. As the years crawl on, technology advances rapidly, evolving mankind into an age where people of the world have instant access to one another through satellite connections and Internet messaging.

And yet, as drastically as most things change, some simply adapt — improving with advances in technology but remaining fundamentally the same as when they first came about.

Amateur, or ham, radio lands firmly and comfortably into this latter category. Despite utilizing such resources as the Internet to improve upon its basis, amateur radio remains essentially the same as when it came about approximately 100 years ago.

"A lot of people get into amateur radio as a hobby," said Jeff Clingan, a member of North East Mississippi Radio Amateurs, a group of radio hobbyists based out of Itawamba County. "Ham radio is just an amazing thing. You can communicate worldwide and get to experience different cultures."

Although instant access to people from across the globe has become more commonplace with the development of the Internet, Clingan asserts that there is still a broad interest in ham radio as a way to connect with different people.

"The fascination with communication by radio is that you're communicating with someone, and there is nothing physically between you such as copper cable," Clingan said. "You're talking through the air to them ... it's just you and your radio and them and their radio."

Although popular as a hobby, amateur radio has become a modern necessity for its public service practicality.

"During emergency situations — tornados, hurricanes, severe weather, wildfires — we support the local agencies — Emergency Management, Red Cross, FEMA and the Salvation Army," Clingan said. "If the commercial systems go down, we usually can still communicate. There is seldomly a case that stops us from communication."

Amateur radio operators play a large role in communicating vital information during emergencies such as severe weather.

By relaying information to each other from across the state, agencies such as Emergency Management know how a storm is moving and where it will strike next. It's a quick, reliable way to communicate during dangerous situations, and it has been so for many years.

Gov. Haley Barbour recently honored the amateur radio operators of Mississippi by declaring the week of June 18 as Amateur Radio Week. According to Itawamba County Emergency Management Director Shae Collum, amateur radio operators like Clingan have become a vital part of Itawamba County during dangerous situations.

"When I've got my hands full down here, he's got his hands full with the radios," Collum said of Clingan. "If the phone lines and everything else are down, we still have radio contact to keep people prepared."

Itawamba County's amateur radio operators remain largely unsung public servants, but it doesn't make them any less willing to help out.

"We don't ask for a lot of recognition, and we don't get it," Clingan said with a smile. "But [amateur radio] can be very rewarding. It's just a good way to give back to your community."

For more information on amateur radio in Itawamba County, please visit the North East Mississippi Radio Amateurs' website at [www.nemsradio.org](http://www.nemsradio.org).