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**Wednesday**  
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# Brunswick Times-Gazette

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### Brunswick Times-Gazette

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## Brunswick Times-Gazette: News

### Severe weather alert system ready

Tuesday, January 5, 2010 11:18 AM EST

Lisa Andrews

Womack News Service

MECKLENBURG COUNTY - Recently the National Weather Service held the annual Skywarn Recognition Day 2009 across the U.S. Locally the Lake Country Amateur Radio Service participated in the event by having the Ham repeaters connected to the National Weather Service for five of the 24 hours in an effort to help determine the available coverage across the United States and to recognize the efforts Ham radio operators put into the Skywarn weather service.

As it so happened during the testing period, on Dec. 5, a severe weather warning was issued and as always the Ham radio repeaters were automatically connected to the National Weather Service (NWS) in Wakefield (the regions headquarters). During this weather alert the Ham (slang for amateur radio operator) operators were also in constant communication with the NWS in Raleigh, N.C., because the Mecklenburg County area usually has the same weather as them, according to Lake Country Amateur Radio Services (LCARS) past Vice-President Sammy Simmons, Sr., KD4MJO. The Lake Country Amateur Radio Service (LCARS) has embraced technology and has an IRLP (Internet Repeater Linking Project) on the repeaters near South Hill, Interstate 85 and Interstate 95.

"IRLP is the somewhat new technology that allows voice over the Internet," Simmons said. "We can connect to any place in the world with our local repeater system and communicate as if we were only on the local repeaters.

"We have a repeater system that is the envy of a lot of places. We have my 443.525 KD4MJO Repeater, the 147.000 KB2AHZ and the 146.625 K4SVA in Jarratt all linked full time and the 146.745 N4WFU in Roanoke Rapids, N.C. that joins this system during Skywarn Emergencies or any severe weather."

Developed in 1999 by the National Weather Service and the American Radio Relay League, Skywarn Recognition Day is designed to celebrate the contributions that SKYWARN radio operators make to the National Weather Service. During a 24-hour period, Skywarn operators visit NWS offices and contact other radio operators across the world.

"This system gives us a coverage area that extends 40 miles north of the North Carolina/Virginia line on Interstate 85," Simmons continued. "(It also extends) 40 miles west of South Hill, 40 miles south on Interstate 85 and down to the Interstate 95 corridor where the Jarratt, and the Roanoke Rapids, N.C. repeaters take over with 60 miles north on Interstate 95 and 60 miles south along with 40 miles to the east.

"So you can see we have a large coverage for weather reporting or any emergency. We can also, through this IRLP, connect to any other IRLP anywhere in the world," Simmons said.

He said that most people do not know about the efforts it takes to monitor the weather or what coverage the area has and how local people are up and about and in contact with the NWS all day and night during bad weather in the area.

The group covers Mecklenburg, Brunswick, Lunenburg and Greenville Counties in Virginia and Warren, Vance, Halifax and Northampton Counties in North Carolina.

"We are actually the ones that help to issue weather watches for our area," Simmons said. "All this; and at no expense to any government or taxpayer, whatsoever. We are all volunteers but we are also non-profit and will accept donations. Myself and fellow Hams who own all this equipment just want to give back something."

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He said with new Narrow Band laws taking effect by 2013, local fire departments, rescue squads, and the sheriff's office will have to replace equipment. The equipment that is being replaced would add to LCARS equipment and the organization can offer tax receipts for all equipment these local agencies are willing to donate.

"We would benefit greatly by the donations of that equipment that we can still put to use to provide backup at no cost to these organizations," Simmons noted. "Commercial radio equipment owners could also benefit by the donation of their equipment."

"We are always doing something in South Hill but not that people can look at," Simmons said. He said the equipment is owned, operated and maintained by the Hams.

The Lake Country Amateur (Ham) Radio Club Web site is . The groups President is Leslie Kubasek, KJ4BMQ, Vice-President Ricky Puryear, KJ4BMS and the Secretary-Treasurer Any Moseley, KF4KBS. Simmons stressed that the group is not for profit and seeks the public support in sponsoring funds for equipment and services. <http://www.lcarsonline.org/> [www.lcarsonline.org](http://www.lcarsonline.org) <http://www.lcarsonline.org>

"We are not allowed to charge for any of the services we provide in time of emergency or for public service," Simmons said. "We can provide communications in any place or situation. We as Hams with our simple equipment can deliver communications as our motto says: When all else fails."

"The NWS call us the 'eyes on the ground,'" Simmons noted. "When bad weather is in the area, we are on the air with the NWS and also out there watching and reporting any severe weather or damages."

Simmons said that LCARS is fortunate to have the free access too, some with maintenance agreements, use of radio towers in most areas such as the Barker Construction Company tower in South Hill, the Duke Power towers near Chase City and the Greenville County Water tanks

"In most cases we try to provide some assistance to the owners by doing the spraying around the towers and buildings and in some cases cutting the grass on site," Simmons said. "We have been very fortunate in acquiring tower space in this area. We couldn't do all we do without the assistance of those tower owners."

He said the emergency services efforts include providing a means of communication during emergencies such as hurricanes. He said they are able to provide communication when electrical power is lost and cell towers are overloaded or go out. He said the group is able to operate on batteries, solar power, with generators, and through the use of low power stations, for very long stretches of time.

He said the Ham operators can and do communicate with the space shuttles, the space station and that most astronauts are licensed Amateur Radio Operators. He said they welcome the opportunity to offer communication assistance during parades, walks and other organized events in the area.

The group meets the first Saturday of every month at 9 a.m. at Brian's Steakhouse in South Hill and is seeking members, not just Ham operators, but also anyone who wants to be a part of helping the community. He welcomes anyone interested in the Lake Country Amateur Radio Service and anyone who would like to become a licensed Ham radio operator to join the group. They offer a Licensing Study Class to those who wish to take the federally mandated test to become a Ham operator.

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