

## Broadcast club makes friends globally, via the airwaves

May 29, 2019 By [B.C. Manion](#)

Their introduction to the world of amateur radio came in different ways.

Don Curtis was still quite young when he started tinkering with car radios.

"I was able to take stuff apart and put stuff together," says Curtis, who went on to develop a fascination for electronics. That preoccupation led to a career in communications, and an avid interest in amateur radio, also called ham radio. That was more than a half-century ago.

His wife, Janice, current president of the Zephyrhills Area Amateur Radio Club, decided to pursue her license so she could talk to Don when he was on the road.



These three couples are active members of the Zephyrhills Area Amateur Radio Club. They are, from left: Charlie and Toni Nelson; Peggy and Rich Kennedy; and, Don and Janice Curtis. (B.C. Manion)

She's been licensed for 43 years.

Rich Kennedy, another club member, became intrigued in the pursuit when he was a Scout.

"There was a merit badge for learning signaling," Rich recalls. "One of the things you had to learn for that, at that time, was Morse Code. I learned Morse Code."

His scoutmaster was a ham radio operator, so Rich went to his house and saw a multitude of radios. He knew then

that he wanted to become a radio operator.

Decades later, Rich still prefers to communicate using Morse Code.

His wife, Peggy, is relatively new to the hobby.

"I love talking around the world. It's wonderful," she says.

"My first contact was the Netherlands. Then, I reached Australia. I reached France, and I reached Hawaii.

"Then, when I hit Italy, I spoke to them in Italian because my family is from Palermo.

"I had such a backup of Italians wanting to talk to me, it was incredible," she says, the memory prompting a smile.

Charlie Nelson, the club's vice president, has been a ham radio operator for decades.

"My passion is building antennas, primarily because they're too expensive to buy from the store," Charlie says.

Much of what he knows has been acquired under the patient tutelage of Don, Charlie adds.

Sharing what they know is a common trait among ham radio operators, club members say.

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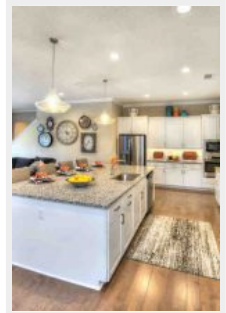
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#### 07/11/2019 – Beading with Kim

The Land O' Lakes Library, 2818 Collier Parkway, will present "Beading with Kim" on July 11 from 10 a.m. to noon, for ages 18 and older. Registration is required. A Foundry waiver and safety form also is required. For information, call (813) 929-1214. ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

#### 07/11/2019 – CareerSource stop

CareerSource's Mobile One Stop will be at the Zephyrhills Public Library, 5347 Eighth St., July 11 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and on the second Thursday of every month. Customers can look for employment, polish and print resumes, copy and scan materials, use email and social media, and talk to a workforce professional. For information, visit [CareerSourcePascoHernando.com](#). ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

It's not unusual, either, for the members to share equipment.

"If they come to the club, and they don't have money or they need help, chances are one of us will give them a radio," Charlie says.

It's a pursuit that can cost as little \$30, or as much as \$30,000, Charlie adds, depending on what the operator wants or is able to spend on it.

And, it's a hobby that attracts people from all walks of life, including celebrities, members of royalty, or regular Janes and Joes.

It's also a hobby that can capture the imagination of young and old, alike.

And, the devices can be adapted so that even people who have physical challenges can still enjoy the hobby, Janice says.

Charlie's wife, Toni, got into ham radio after marrying Charlie.

And, like other club members, she marvels at what ham radio operators can do.

For example, Rich says, "I can wait for a time when the International Space Station is coming over, and I can listen to the communication with the astronauts and, when it's my turn, I can talk to somebody on the International Space Station."

They also step in to provide a vital service during times of disaster, club members say.

When the power goes out, or cell towers go down, ham radios continue to operate.

"The radio operators will go there with their pickup trucks, with their equipment and they will contact the fire department, they will contact the police department. They will keep them abreast of the situation that's going on and where emergency treatment is necessary," Peggy says.

The use of ham radios "is integrated into the emergency plan of the state of Florida," Rich says.

When communication systems breakdown, ham radios can plug the gap.

When Hurricane Michael hit the Panhandle, there were amateur radio operators riding in fire trucks and ambulances because they could communicate directly, Rich says.

Some amateur radio operators are motivated by a desire to be of service to others. Others enjoy the social aspects. Some are drawn to the technical challenges.

There are no age requirements, and no age limits.

"We have 8- and 9-year-olds that are members of our Lakeland club," Rich says.

"They get on that radio and run circles around the rest of us. They're just so talented," Peggy adds.

Anyone who would like to know more is invited to attend a future Zephyrhills Area Amateur Radio Club. The group meets on the third Monday of the month, at Saint Elizabeth Episcopal Church, 5855 16th St., in Zephyrhills. For more information, visit [ZAARC.org](http://ZAARC.org).

#### Zephyrhills Area Amateur Radio Club

**Where:** Saint Elizabeth Episcopal Church, 5855 16th St., Zephyrhills

**When:** The third Monday of the month. The meeting starts at 7 p.m.; the board meeting starts at 6 p.m.

**Details:** These amateur radio operators enjoy sharing their knowledge; they step up to help in times of emergency; they step up during times of need; and, they like to talk with people from all over the world.



Don Curtis chats across country with a fellow amateur radio operator from the comfort of a room equipped with radios, in his East Pasco home.

#### 07/11/2019 – Magic performance

The New River Library, 34043 State Road 54 in Wesley Chapel, will host a Summer Reading Club for kindergarten through fourth grade on July 11 at 2 p.m., featuring "The Moogician." Todd Charles is a comedy-variety entertainer who combines magic, juggling, music and comedy. For information, call (813) 788-6375. ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

#### 07/11/2019 – Make a magnet

The Land O' Lakes Library, 2818 Collier Parkway, will offer a Teen Crafternoon on July 11 from 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., for ages 13 to 18. Participants can create a universe of stories on a jar lid magnet, by using pictures, work clippings, glitter and other doodads. Resin will be poured on top to seal the art. The resin will set for a week, at which time the teens can return to pick up their product. For information, call (813) 929-1214. ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

#### 07/11/2019 – Make a rocket

The New River Library, 34043 State Road 54 in Wesley Chapel, will host a rocket class for tweens on July 11 from 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. Participants can launch rockets using soda bottles, baking soda and vinegar. For information, call (813) 788-6375. ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

#### 07/11/2019 – Reading clubs

The Hugh Embry Library, 14215 Fourth St., in Dade City, will host a Summer Reading Club: Moogician on July 11 at 10:30 a.m., and a Teen Summer Reading Club: Particle Beads & Retro Gaming on the same day at 3:30 p.m. For information, call (352) 567-3576. ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

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The club also has an informal breakfast meeting on Thursdays at 8 a.m., at Village Inn, 4214 Gall Blvd., in Zephyrhills.

Info: [ZAARC.org](http://ZAARC.org)

### Frequently asked questions about ham radio

#### Who uses ham radio?

Amateur radio, also known as ham radio, attracts people of all ages, income levels, nationalities

and walks of life. They communicate in various ways, such as talking into a microphone, sending Morse code, or interfacing their radio with a tablet and typing out a message.

#### What's the appeal of ham radio?

Some people simply enjoy talking with others across the country, or world, without the need for the Internet or a cellphone network. Others are attracted by experimenting with electronics. Some want to serve their community during emergencies, such as hurricanes, tornadoes or floods. Some enjoy making new friends with people they meet over the radio.

#### How much does ham radio cost?

Basic study materials to obtain an entry-level license cost about \$40. You can take a license class sponsored by a local amateur radio club, or use online options. You can generally find a good handheld radio for less than \$100, and then go from there.

#### What is the AARL?

The 165,000-member American Radio Relay League was founded in 1914. It is a national association for Amateur Radio in the United States. The association sponsors on-air operating events, and provides books, news, study material and other types of support for individuals and clubs.

Source: *The American Radio Relay League*. For more information, visit [ARRL.org](http://ARRL.org).

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8

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