



## The Newsroom

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# GREY & B

# Radios at the ready

## *Broadcast amateurs have fun preparing for something they hope doesn't happen*

BY MATTHEW NOPPER  
*Sun Times staff*

**RAVENNA**

Two portable antennas, along with a few trucks and trailers, were the only indication from the road that something out of the ordinary was happening Saturday in a field south of Ravenna.

Amateur radio operators from Grey and Simcoe counties worked around the clock this weekend to set up field radio communication stations as part of the Radio Amateurs of Canada Field Day.

Run in conjunction with a similar event in the U.S., the contest sees some 35,000 participants across North America set up remote communication systems and make contact with as many operators in Canada and the U.S. as possible in a 24-hour period starting Saturday afternoon.

It's a lot of fun for the participants, but it's also a way to brush up on skills that may one day be needed if a natural disaster knocks out power and telephone lines.

"The goal here is emergency preparedness," said Brad Rodriguez, Grey County emergency co-ordinator for the Amateur Radio Emergency Service, one of three organizations on hand. Also involved in the exercise were the Collingwood Elective Radio Teaching School and the Blue Mountain Amateur Radio Club.

"Our objective is to set up a temporary station with generators to provide the power and portable equipment . . . and operate for 24 hours as though an emergency situation," said the

"When there are tornadoes, when there are floods, when there are fires, when there's an ice storm in eastern Ontario and Quebec, we get called out to provide radio communications," he said.

"You hope there's never an earthquake or a tornado, or another ice storm, but you want to be prepared for it," he said.

Arnold St. Amand's truck is the very definition of mobile communication.

The Collingwood-area resident has been a member of the Blue Mountain Amateur Radio Club since 1954.

His Ford pickup is equipped with two transmitters and three antennas. From his truck, he's talked to people all across the world.

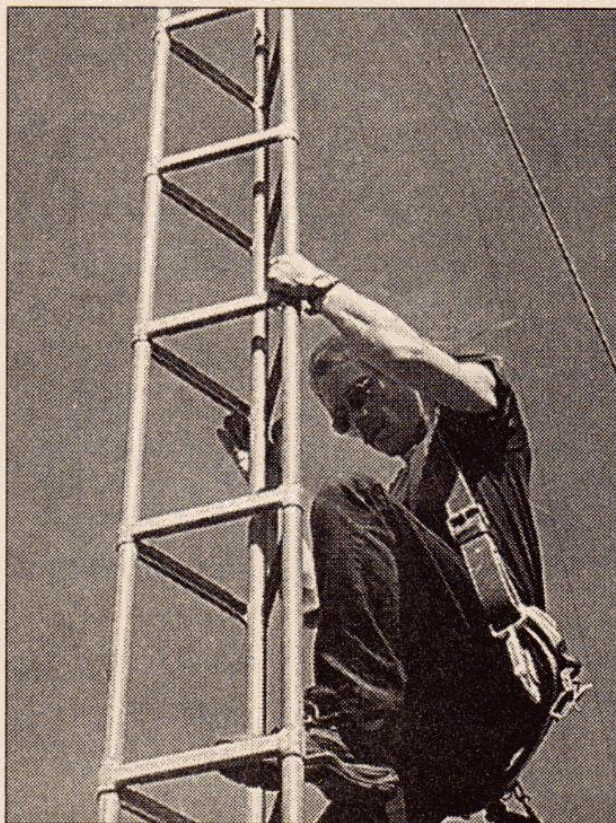
"He's one of our very best emergency resources," noted Rodriguez.

"This thing here is for the use of about anybody," said St. Amand. "If all the power goes out in town, as long as I've got gasoline, I can run this thing. I've got two tanks on this thing, so I can run a long time."

In the 1950s when Hurricane Hazel hit southern Ontario, St. Amand listened to reports of the storm from his bedroom on his shortwave radio.

"All the radio stations were getting their information from the amateur radio operators . . . because most of the wires were down," he said.

An amateur radio operator was stationed at



James Jackson scales a temporary antenna tower.

clubs that get up and running the fastest and make the most contacts with operators in various classes, depending on the number of transmitters used.

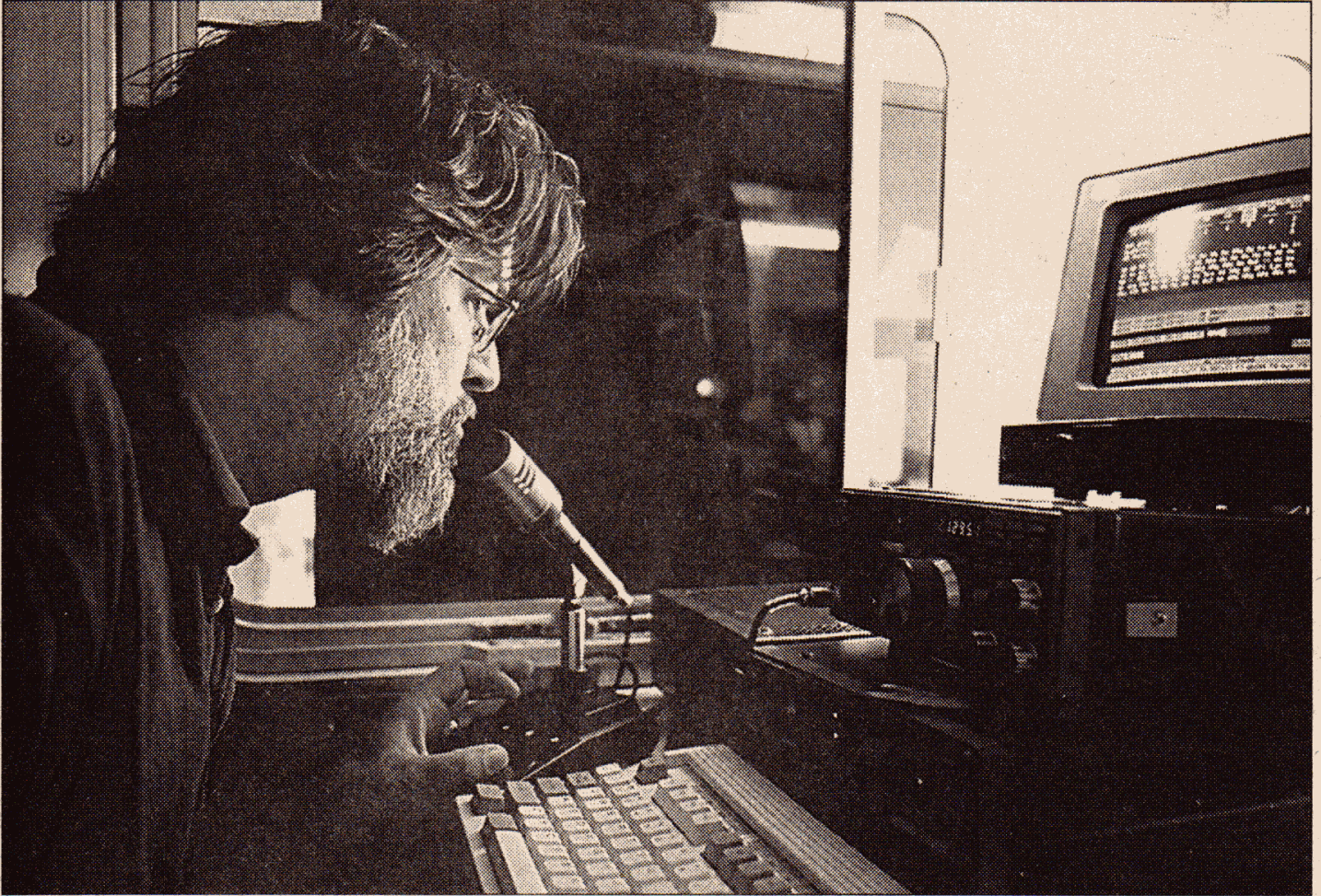
"The main objective is to have fun and show that we can do this, but also to try and just talk to as many different stations in as many different places as we can in North America."

As a member of the Amateur Radio Emergency Service, Rodriguez is interested specifically in emergency situations.

back and forth during the storm, he said.

Today's communication systems are much smaller than those used in the past.

"Before you used to have a power supply, then you had a receiver, which were all separate units," St. Amand said. "It (was) much bigger from what they have now. Everything has changed so much . . . now, it's only powered off the truck, and it runs a hundred watts, and back in the good old days, you were lucky to get 50 watts out."



Sun Times photos by Allison Kennedy

Brad Rodriguez of the Amateur Radio Emergency Service of Grey County tries to contact a fellow radio enthusiast in California Saturday.