

Base closing affects radio club

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Hams' last days spent on the air

By Chambers Boyd
Staff Writer

A dozen local ham radio operators spent a recent weekend making contact with more than 400 amateur radio stations around the world.

While perhaps not everyone's idea of how to spend a weekend, those folks decided it was the most fitting way to honor the passing of one of the most distinctive operations at the Naval Air Warfare Center in Warminster: the base's amateur radio club, which uses station KSNAL.

That station soon will move to Patuxent River, Md., with the rest of the Navy operations at the base.

So club trustee Doug Crompton and his fellow members took to the airwaves in a "marathon" effort that spanned the station's last two days of operation in the township.

Crompton said the marathon actually only took a total of about nine hours over the two days to accomplish.

Contact was made with stations in Mexico, Texas, Wisconsin and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, among others.

Crompton said the effort was a tribute to the base as much as to the station.

"We're all saddened by the closing of the base in general," he said. "Quite a few of us have worked here all our lives."

Over the years, the radio antenna has offered civil-defense availability, local and distant emergency transmissions, and public relations and internal communications, according to Joan Marie Brown, a spokesperson at the base.

The antenna often transmitted information from personnel at the base's labs and received data from projects in the field.

During a 1955 flood of the Delaware River, the NAWC radio club and the Bucks County Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service dispatched helicopters to rescue flood victims, Brown said.

And the antenna allowed area families to contact relatives serving overseas during the Vietnam War.

During recent earthquakes in California and Mexico, the station was used to get in touch with relatives of those who work at the base.

Manning the station with Crompton Sept. 15 and 16 were club members Steve Larson, Dan Flynn,



Martin F. Squicciarini of Lansdale (left) and Doug Crompton of Richboro are part of the 50-year-old amateur radio club.
(Staff photo by E. Stace Leichter)

Marti Squicciarini, Dave Seevers, John Gambale, Joe Bagnick, Fred Stowell, Marty Leblang, Dean Nathans, Dave Daugherty and Jim Peron.

Crompton said such broadcasts are not uncommon in the world of amateur radio. They are advertised ahead of time in magazines read by ham radio operators.

In some cases, he and other club members engaged in conversations with the people who called them. Callers were curious as to why the marathon was being held and why the base was closing, Crompton said.

The club once boasted more than 100 members. Now, there are just 20. Most work for the base or are contractors with the base. Crompton said perhaps four are moving to Maryland.

Most of those who remain plan to be active in the Warminster Amateur Radio Club, which meets at the Benjamin S. Wilson Senior Center.

The station, which is filled with screens, monitors, transmitters and such, will take about six months to dismantle.

But Crompton said he's not certain it will be dismantled.

He has been told the Navy wants to avoid moving any unnecessary equipment to Maryland. And because there's already a station in Maryland, Warminster Township may be the ultimate beneficiary of the equipment, he said.

Crompton said he's absolutely certain of one thing: If the equipment remains at the base, local ham operators will not let it go to waste.