

# West Central IL Hamfest to Connect Local Amateur Radio Operators

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
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CARLINVILLE - The West Central Illinois Hamfest invites amateur radio operators and others who are interested in how amateur radio can be used as both a hobby and emergency management tool.

Hamfest will run from 7 a.m. to noon on Aug. 5 at the Macoupin County Fairgrounds in Carlinville. This year's Hamfest will feature several local amateur radio clubs, a presentation on how radio was used during the Civil War, a forum about amateur radio on Route 66 and several more presentations and activities.

“If folks want to learn more about amateur radio, this is the place to come do it. We’ll have some of the best amateur radio people in the country,” said Jim Pitchford, who is on the Hamfest Committee and a member of the Macoupin County Amateur Radio Club.

Pitchford has been an amateur radio operator since 1989. He explained that Hamfests are held around the world to connect amateur radio operators (also called “hams”). This year’s West Central Illinois Hamfest will offer displays, seminars, classes and a flea market. New hams can also take the exam for an amateur radio operator license issued by the Federal Communications Commission.

At 8 a.m., local Abraham Lincoln impersonator Randy Duncan will give a presentation about radio use during the Civil War. This will be followed by a talk titled “Traveling the Historic Route 66 Scenic Byway on Its 100th Anniversary: What Hams and the General Public Need to Know.” Additional sessions will continue throughout the morning; visit the [official Facebook page](#) for a full itinerary.

West Central Illinois Hamfest is sponsored by the [Macoupin County Amateur Radio Club](#) in Carlinville, the [Sangamon Valley Radio Club](#) in Springfield, the [Okaw Valley Amateur Radio Club](#) in Greenville and the [Montgomery County Radio Club](#) in Hillsboro. Other local clubs, including the [Lewis and Clark Amateur Radio Club](#) in Alton and the [Egyptian Radio Club](#) in Granite City, will likely be in attendance.

While amateur radio can be a fun way to connect with people from around the world, Pitchford notes that it also serves a practical — and important — purpose in emergency management. Hospitals and emergency response teams have amateur radio equipment so that communication is possible when phone lines are down. Many hams discover amateur radio through a desire to help.

“In the event that we lose our primary communications tools, we can always utilize amateur radio as a communications tool to support our local emergency responders or hospitals or public health departments,” Pitchford explained.

He added that the Macoupin County Amateur Radio Club was founded to support emergency management in the area. They assist with communications and traffic control for drive-through flu clinics and COVID-19 testing sites, for example. Even severe weather management is possible through amateur radio.

“We’re getting into hurricane season,” Pitchford said. “Because of the location of amateur radio stations on the Gulf Coast and the East Coast of the United States, a lot of those are susceptible to severe weather. So the net control for the National Hurricane Center is generally here in the middle of the United States. We can talk from Illinois to

Florida or Puerto Rico or South America as good as anybody on the East Coast or West Coast, and we are less susceptible to that bad weather.”

Other hams engage with amateur radio solely as a hobby or a way to chat with people from around the world. Some use it to remotely control airplanes or helicopters. Others create amateur television stations and send pictures via radio signals. A few hams use a method called “moon bouncing” to talk to people across the globe.

“They’ll send a signal to the moon and somebody on the other side of the world will see the moon up there, and it’ll bounce that signal right down to their receivers so they can talk back,” Pitchford explained. “We have people that have experience talking with the International Space Station. It’s kind of fun to talk to an astronaut. Literally, just sit there on a radio and push a button to talk to somebody on the International Space Station as it goes over. It’s a pretty cool experience.”

You can learn more about amateur radio at Hamfest on Aug. 5. General admission is \$5, which also enters you in a drawing for a \$500 radio. Kids 16 and under are free. For more information, visit the [Hamfest Facebook page](#).

