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As rain cascaded down upon the field beside Mount Caesar Elementary School in Swanzey Saturday afternoon, it added a deep drumming sound to the growing chorus of Morse code blips, radio static, a humming generator and obscure voices floating into transceivers from the ether.

This sonic symphony, sponsored by the Cheshire County DX Amateur Radio Club, brought members together to test their skills and equipment.

“It serves two purposes. One, it’s an open house for a hobby,” said Jeff Mungovan, the club’s public information officer. “The second — and more important — purpose is testing members’ preparedness to operate in public safety scenarios.

“God forbid, Keene gets destroyed by a tornado today,” Mungovan added. “The fact is, you can set some of these stations up in less than half an hour.”

Amateur radio, also called ham radio, is a hobby that brings people together to communicate via radio waves across towns, regions and the world, according to the American Radio Relay League. The league sponsored the national field day event, which the league says involves more than 40,000 ham radio operators in North America attempting to contact as many other operators as they can.

Every member had different stories about how they first started dabbling in the hobby. Club President Ronald Osimo, of Rindge, first became interested after seeing amateur radio’s public safety benefits as a kid. He was living in Southbridge, Mass., in 1955 when Hurricane Diane rolled through, causing massive flooding.

“Two o’clock in the morning ... they evacuated us to the top of the hill,” he said. “And then all of a sudden the dam busted ... upriver, and it just went down.”

The town had a civil defense program as part of the fire department, and the director was a ham radio operator. Town residents gathered at a school, Osimo said, and the only working communication during the flood was the ham radio.

“After that flood, every school in the town of Southbridge had an amateur radio in it,” he said. “And it’s still there today.”

Mungovan said he first became involved through citizens band radio — commonly referred to as a CB — a type of radio communication involving shorter distances that was wildly popular in the 1970s. One night, he changed frequencies and listened in to other conversations.

“I was listening to some local hams out of Keene talking, and they were talking to other stations in Cheshire County and there was another one down in Springfield, Mass.,” Mungovan said.

“And I said, ‘What is this device that is allowing these people to talk for over 50 miles?’ ”

The club held its first meeting in 1992, and it has around 45 members, according to Mungovan. In the county, however, he estimated that there are around 500 licensed operators.

Amateur radio allows for more than talking, however. Some members received Morse code messages on Saturday, while others connected their computers to others across the region in a quasi-internet. In fact, with the right software, operators can send and receive images across

radio waves. All communications Saturday afternoon were transmitted through a large antenna situated out in the field, constructed by Troy resident Billy Chaffee.

As the day ticked towards 4 p.m. and the rain picked up, Osimo began contacting various operators in the area. Headphones in and notepad in hand, he logged call details including frequency, date and time.

The field day also prepares members for one of their biggest events: the Clarence DeMar Marathon. Operators play a vital role behind the scenes, manning 23 stations — including a mobile unit at the back of the race — to provide communications about runner placements and medical emergencies.

“There’s some parts of this county where there is no such thing as cell service,” Mungovan said. “And unfortunately, one of the areas is Gilsum and Surry, which is where the route runs through ... we’re kind of a sanctuary for operations.”

Osimo summarized the whole hobby in a single sentence: “When all else fails, amateur radio takes over.”