

## Meet a Different Kind of Ham at the Geauga Fair

by **Diana J. Cathan**

The hams will be at the Great Geauga County Fair! Not the porkers in the Swine Barn but a different kind of hams – the nickname for amateur radio operators.

Licenses are issued and regulated by the FCC and hams must operate under its rules. There are three levels of testing for a license: starting with Technician Class, followed by General Class and then Amateur Extra Class, the top level with the most privileges. The FCC issues a license with the operator's assigned call

sign. Hams identify each other by call sign during radio communications and often wear the call sign on hats, shirts, tags, key fobs, etc., when out in public, to identify themselves to other hams.

The hams at the fair are members of Geauga Amateur Radio Association (GARA), the local club for amateur radio operators. They will be set up in the office of the fire station south of the main grandstand next to the racetrack. They will be working the radios and passing out information on amateur radio from 12:00 noon to

8:00 p.m. each day of the fair. GARA will also provide emergency communications if and when they might be needed at the fair.

Last year GARA members were able to "work" Pittsburgh from the fairgrounds: this year they hope to have a high frequency station up and running. They will be happy to demonstrate and explain more about amateur radio.

It's not necessary to reside in Geauga County to belong to GARA. Members hail from all parts of the county, plus Aurora, Fairport Harbor, Mentor, Painesville and

West Farmington, among others. Hams often have affiliations with multiple clubs.

Besides local clubs, hams may join other groups. With more than 156,000 members, the largest organization of amateur radio licensees in the United States is The American Radio Relay League (ARRL), founded in 1914 in the infancy of radio broadcasting. (This country began licensing amateurs in 1912.) ARRL's purpose is "to promote and advance the art, science and enjoyment of amateur radio."

Who are the hams?

GARA members range in age from teens to nineties and come from all walks of life. Many members have found time to pursue the hobby after retirement, but others remain in the workforce and keep busy raising young families besides. What they all share is an interest in amateur radio.

Hams often contact each other through formal or informal "nets" (networks) which have a specific purpose and are guided by a person assigned as net controller. Regular nets usually have backup net controllers on standby to fill

in when needed.

Hams use traffic nets to pass messages from station to station. Messages may be from hams who cannot reach the recipient through direct contact by radio because of distance, so the message is passed from operator to operator until it reaches someone much closer geographically. You do not need to be a ham to have messages transmitted.

Which brings us to the serious side of ham radio. Though some of the nets seem mostly for fun, they're actually practice for communication. **(continued pg. 21A)**