



Contributed photo

This photo from the American Relay Radio League shows Amateur Radio enthusiasts in action.

# Locals reach out through the airways

By MARSHA FLEEGER

[mfleeger@recordargusnews.com](mailto:mfleeger@recordargusnews.com)

SHARON — While Amateur Radio enthusiasts have the capability of connecting with operators around the world, local operators were connecting with each other in person Wednesday in Sharon.

One of them was Mike Varga of Fredonia, who got into Ham Radio after seeing a picture and brief article on a local operator in the paper and thinking it was something he'd like to look into. That connection got him invited to the Mercer County Amateur Radio Club.

"I started coming to meetings and met one of the members who asked what I was using for an antenna," Varga said. "I said I didn't have one, and he said, 'you're coming over to my house this weekend and we're going to build you one.'"

Thirty-two years later, Varga is still doing it and wishes he could do it for a living because he loves being on the radio talking to people from over 30 countries.

The  
American  
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logo



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**SHARON —** Mercer County Amateur Radio Club representatives Tom Abernathy, Tim Duffy and Joe Shupienis receive the ARRL Special Service Award from American Relay Radio Club CEO Tom Gallagher (second from right) in the Auditorium of Penn State Shenango Wednesday evening.

HAM

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Getting ready to retire, Larry Rodgers of Mercer pulled up a list of the top 10 hobbies for retired people on the Internet, and amateur radio was on the list. He said something to his neighbor, who replied, "that's funny I just got my license," and the neighbor set him up with the club.

Rodgers had his licenses within a year and has talked to 42 countries and 18 states all with a wire stretched between two trees.

"It's a great hobby for retired people," Rodgers said. "It's fun to do and there is a lot of camaraderie."

Members of the Mercer County Amateur Radio Club gathered in the Auditorium at Penn State Shenango Wednesday evening to listen to Tom Gallagher — call sign NY2RF — CEO of American Relay Radio Club, discuss the future of the organization.

Gallagher also presented the Mercer County club with a special service award.

Gallagher started his presentation by reflecting on the question his favorite architect, Louis Kahn, always asked students in his architecture classes — what does this brick want to be?

"It took me almost two decades to figure out that he was talking about organizations, villages and



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**SHARON —** Mike Varga of Fredonia and Larry Rodgers of Mercer are both amateur radio operators and members of the Mercer County Amateur Radio Club.

countries put together of small individual parts," Gallagher said. "Hold onto that metaphor, think about the importance of an individual part to a much larger whole."

Gallagher told the Mercer County Club and members of clubs from as far away as Erie and the Case Western Reserve University Collegiate Amateur Radio Club that ARRL wants to expand the role of radio in the education world and hopes to reach across age and gender gaps to attract new amateur radio operators in its second century of service, having celebrated its centennial in 2015.

ARRL is also trying to create events to generate interest like their National Parks On the Air this year which highlighted various

national parks in honor of the National Park Service's 100th anniversary.

They will also be having an event celebrating the 181st birthday of Mark Twain from his homestead in Hartford, Conn., broadcast on W1T on Nov. 30.

Gallagher pointed out that amateur radio operators are an aging population with the average member being 61 years of age and only 15 percent of members under 45. He challenged members to pick up a brick.

"Find yourself a talented young person and introduce them to amateur radio," he suggested. "Teach an electronics or licensing course, or find an amateur operator with interests that are different from yours and learn from each other."