

Excellent First ARES(R) Santa Delivery Exhibit

by Gordon Gibby KX4Z

It was C-O-L-D at 0700 32oF when we arrived and immediately went to work setting up VHF and HF antennas, and multiple canopies, tables and chairs! **Leland Gallup AA3YB** expertly moved the generator/mast trailer into position -- LifeSouth organizer Laura B. had given us a wonderful position that allowed us to expand almost without limit, and also right where the crowds tended to enter! **David Huckstep's** fingers got so cold he couldn't start the bolts, and I was just able to get one started before my fingers likewise were getting clumsy!

Nevertheless, we did it! Everyone pitched in and a slew of hands were setting things up all simultaneously. We set up for our very first display at Life South's famous Santa Delivery, along with maybe 30+ other neighborhood organizations! And we helped out with security duty for the arrival of the Santa Helicopter (Shands One) -- monitoring ground team VHF frequency for instructions. **Susan Halbert KG4VWI** policed the entire landing zone almost by herself, declaring it one of the safest ones she's ever checked. **Eric Pleace KO4ZSD**, as usual, was *everywhere*, helping everyone.



A front-view of our setup when it was still pretty cold out there!

Our major "attractions" included:

- **Ron Lewis KN4ZUJ** brought his 1946 Willys Jeep all the way here once again!! It was a big hit with many older children and families. He also provided DOUGHNUTS and hot beverages for our crew -- wow! He had radios EVERYWHERE and just was a huge part of our operation.
- Our ability to show live ham radio on multiple bands, modes and to send immediate texts or emails out by radio (winlink) without using Internet or Cell.
- Our homebrew "\$7 Paddle" hooked up to our homebrew Arduino Electronic Keyer -- children loved the fact that it can READ what they send! We also had it hooked up to an amplified computer speaker (running off batteries) so everyone could HEAR this time! The ability to the keyer to generate continuous dots or dashes was of immense pleasure to one little guy who stayed there for a long time playing with the paddle. **Several times, this drew a CROWD of folks wanting to try out the magical metal contraption.**
- We had a 572-B vacuum tube and wow, did THAT get fascinating for the youngsters, most of whom have never seen a vacuum tube, certainly not one THAT BIG.

When interested people stopped by we could also bring up multiple different facts about our group and Col Huckstep found a very interested family or two and have multiple names signed in on our "More Information" sheet.



It warmed up nicely and David was getting great practice at VARA and his impressive go-box was doing great! When helicopter arrival approached most of us went over to help **Jim Carr KC4MHH** and that helicopter took FOREVER to arrive, but it was very well worth it! The bird made 2 or 3 circles around the field losing altitude and then hovered right in front of everyone, and spun to pick its landing azimuth. We had been warned that "Santa" had sprained his knee the night before, so a golf cart scooped him up and over to his favorite chair to take care of a LONG LONG line of youngsters anxious to tell him their Christmas desires. The kids were having SUCH great fun -- and Domino's was doing a good business with pizza also, I noticed!

We were concerned that we might have overload issues being so close to our sister club, The

Gainesville Amateur Radio Society, but it turned out that they didn't do any HF this time, and we did well with our VHF. Our antenna was thirty feet behind us and 25-30 feet above them. Our trusty generator-mast trailer did the job nicely! We had our 50-ish feet inverted V non-resonant antenna with 9:1 Balun and David's LDG tuner did very well with it. He was also able to directly hit KX4Z-12 for VHF Winlink connections.

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Earl Sloan KI4OXD swooped in and checked into the morning ARES(R) net on 40 meters right from our display!

The GARS Santa-exhibit was a huge hit with the children and they have a solid and winning formula -- but we did well also and at times even had a CROWD!! As usual, I had way too much gear, prepared for almost any exigency, so I can slim down the next time. We had so many canopies that we "loaned" one to a local private school (where I work) for a few hours since they didn't have one. Our signs did great, we hung them in new ways that might be better than



what we did before, and we got more insight into what excites the children and what isn't of as great an interest.

We even helped out a college EE major who is trying to build a severely-constrained, self-deploying 2-meter antenna inside of a rocket, to reach a NASA receiver. The size constraints had his proposed antenna showing about a 5:1 SWR, but with some "innovative" capacitively coupled "top hat" solutions we actually got him very close to 2:1. Ron Lewis gave him oodles of possible solutions and improvements -- he was very very glad that he met up with our group!

Everyone agreed it was a very successful venture! And you should have SEEN the cooperation on tear-down! We had that place cleaned up and packed up very very quickly, and Ron Lewis KN4ZUJ was policing it like a hawk for any trash. Way to go, gang!



David Huckstep moving traffic for us on Winlink.

Our players included *at least* the following:

- Leland Gallup AA3YB
- Susan Halbert KG4VWI
- David Huckstep W4JIR
- Ron Lewis KN4ZUJ
- Dean Covey KV4RL was also around helping out everyone;
- Earl Sloan KI4OXD
- Eric Pleace KO4ZSD
- Gordon Gibby KX4Z

Many, many THANKS and CONGRATULATIONS for a Job Well Done! Along with the GARS crew, we had some of the best and most "crowd-interactive" displays out there! We certainly brought ham radio to life for many families!