

COMMUNITY PROFILES

Amateur radio keeps his retirement active

By Patti Jares
Staff Writer

From as far back as he can remember, Ron James has been "in love with radio" and credits a few key people in his life who helped him as a boy to become a ham radio operator.

It is no surprise that Ron was recently certified as a volunteer examiner, now helping others obtain their ham radio licenses.

Ron, a member of the Escapees RV Club and resident of North Ranch, is vice president of the Hassayampa Amateur Radio Klub (HARK), a group that meets at the park on the second Tuesday of each month. The club is well attended not only by North Ranch residents but also by Wickenburg residents and others from the surrounding areas.

As far as Ron is concerned, the club reopened his world – a world that had closed substantially after retirement.

"I came to North Ranch just after I had retired," said Ron. "I didn't know a soul."

He learned from neighbors there was an amateur radio

club in the park, and he began attending. Once a member, he was encouraged to update his license and now he is an integral part of HARK.

Ron received his first ham radio license as a boy of 15. The church he attended brought in a radio operator to teach Morse code to a group of Boy Scouts in the congregation, and Ron was immediately hooked.

The operator was a polio survivor. He could not get around well on his legs, but sitting in front of a radio he could expertly move from state to state; country to country.

"I was fascinated," admitted Ron, who was so eager to learn that the man took the boy under his wing, mentoring him. He taught him the fundamentals of electronics and helped him gather materials so Ron could build a transmitter.

"I got my novice license," said Ron, who immediately began using the transmitter to communicate with the world at large.

"If my mom and dad knew what was really going on in

my bedroom, they would have shot me," he chuckled. "But it was a step into a world outside my neighborhood."

Once in high school, Ron joined the radio club and after graduation he attended Yuba College. Afterwards, most of his friends were being drafted, so he enlisted in the Army – signing up to go to Europe.

Ron attended the Radio Teletype School in Augusta, Ga., and after graduation was sent to Berlin, where he served for three years as a radio Teletype operator and also escorted convoys through the Autobahn in West Germany.

When he requested a transfer to Vietnam an officer talked him out of it, suggesting he attend Officer Training School. He did, and he eventually became an instructor at the Radio Teletype School in Fort Gordon, Ga.

After his discharge, Ron settled in Fort Carson, Colo., but eventually returned to a small town he had lived in for a time when he was a boy – Chico, Calif.

"It was a little town of 4,000, very agricultural and I'd

always felt like it was home," said Ron.

Ron retired in Sebastopol, Calif., and after spending time debating on how he wanted to spend the rest of his life, he purchased a 15-year-old motor home and joined the large but tight-knit Escapee RV Club.

"I read about what it had to offer, what people felt about each other and about jobs at mobile home parks," said Ron. "Looking through the manual I found North Ranch."

Ron came to North Ranch last year, and according to him, "fell totally in love with Wickenburg, and in particular the North Ranch people."

"I've been in 43 states and lived in 8 or 10, but the mountains out here are just breathtaking," acknowledged Ron. "With the climate and the clean air, Wickenburg is a town that is touristy but has managed to hold on to its sincerity and country flavor – people are friendly and talk to you in a bank line or just walking down the street."

As a resident of North Ranch, Ron most enjoys being an amateur radio oper-

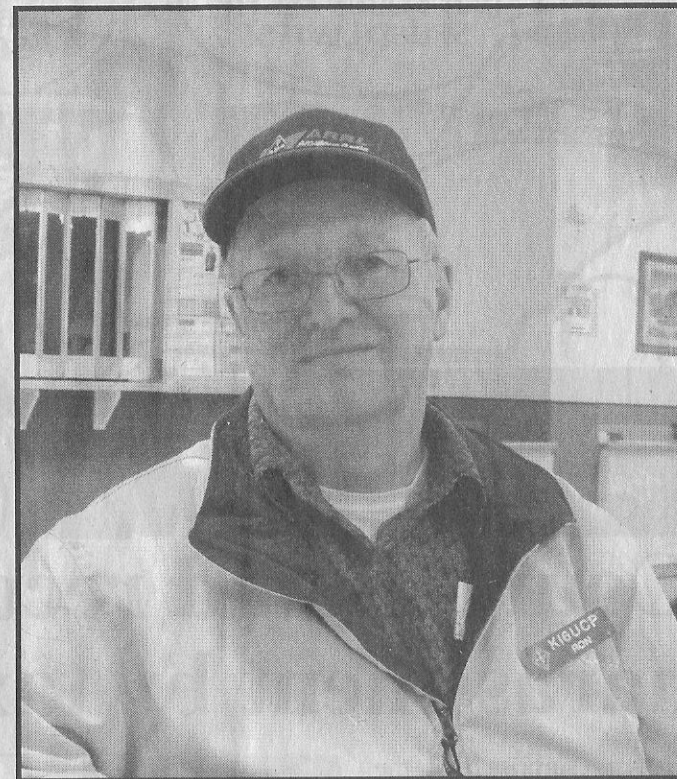


Photo by Patti Jares

North Ranch resident Ron James

ator – and spending time with his new found friends.

"Ham radio has been something that kept my mind growing and active," he said with a smile. "It prevented me from feeling like a useless old man. I talk to Cuba, Argentina, the Dominican Republic,

Switzerland; all over the U.S. – border to border, ocean to ocean. I've explored a whole new way of communication – some really fancy footwork that new equipment provides. And it's the neat people in this club that make a difference."