

Arkansas SKYWARN® Names New President

MOU Renewed with NWS Little Rock and CAREN

by Danny Straessle (KE5WLR)

Entering its fourth decade of providing community service and emergency communications, Arkansas Weather Net, Inc. (aka Arkansas SKYWARN®) has named Greg Staton (K5GSS) as the organization's president. He is preceded by outgoing president Pat Dixon (N5ZSN) who served for the last three years.

Greg is on-call 24/7 with the National Weather Service Little Rock Forecast Office, which activates SKYWARN® at its discretion whenever weather may be severe enough to threaten its 45-county warning area. An updated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among Arkansas SKYWARN®, the National Weather Service, and the Central Arkansas Radio Emergency Net (CAREN Club) has been signed and will serve as the framework for volunteer Amateur Radio operators to coordinate their services, facilities and equipment with the National Weather Service in support of the state of Arkansas and local governments for early warning of emergency weather information and emergency communications.

"Without question, tornado records for the state would not be as complete without the reports provided by Amateur Radio operators," says Little Rock Forecast Office Warning Coordination Meteorologist John Robinson. "People often believe the Doppler weather radar provides all the information we need, but in fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Although the radar often shows rotation thousands of feet above the ground, which could indicate a tornado is present, it cannot provide "ground truth" as to whether or not a tornado actually touched down. This is why Amateur Radio reports are so valuable, especially in the rural parts of Arkansas."

Danny Straessle (KE5WLR) has been named personnel coordinator for Arkansas SKYWARN®. He too is on-call 24/7 and will assist Greg in selecting, training and scheduling volunteer Amateur Radio operators to serve as net control when SKYWARN® is activated by the National Weather Service. Arkansas SKYWARN® net control operators are required every two years to attend a severe storm spotter certification class offered by the National Weather Service. Net control operators are trained how to handle emergency traffic, exhibit proper net etiquette, and to link repeaters.

The Arkansas SKYWARN® Training Net is held every second Tuesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. and is conducted from the National Weather Service Little Rock Forecast Office. The net provides an opportunity to test the linked repeater system, train net control operators, and offer weather-related training material to Amateur Radio operators in the field. Danny will serve as net control for the Arkansas SKYWARN® Training Net. He is preceded by Dale Temple (W5RXU) who has conducted the net for a number of years.

Arkansas SKYWARN® activities are conducted on the W5DI wide-area linked repeater system owned and operated by the Central Arkansas Radio Emergency Net (CAREN Club). When activated, Arkansas SKYWARN® is indicated by one of the most well-known (and unique) courtesy tones heard in the state and is complemented with a tail message every few minutes.

The W5DI linked repeater system covers most of the National Weather Service Little Rock Forecast Office 45-county warning area:

Central Arkansas

146.940 (-) located in Little Rock
444.200 (+) located in Little Rock

Southwest Arkansas

147.270 (+) located in Bismarck

West Arkansas

147.285 (+) located in Clarksville

East Arkansas

147.315 (+) located in Russell

Arkansas SKYWARN® is a club-neutral organization. Participation in net activities is encouraged, appreciated, and open to all Amateur Radio operators holding the equivalent of a valid U.S. Technician Class license or higher. Arkansas SKYWARN® recommends all participating stations attend every two years a severe storm spotter certification class offered by the National Weather Service.

About Arkansas Weather Net, Inc.

Arkansas Weather Net was incorporated as a non-profit Amateur Radio organization in the late 1960s to provide real-time field reports to the National Weather Service in Little Rock (then located at Adams Field) during significant weather events. Nets were conducted over what was then the new FM 2-meter repeater operating on 146.940 MHz constructed by the Central Arkansas Radio Emergency Net (CAREN Club).

A few years later in the early 1970s, the National Weather Service rolled out its official (and trademarked) SKYWARN® program, which collects field reports from volunteer weather spotters to aid forecasters in issuing and verifying severe weather watches and warnings. It was then Arkansas Weather Net began operating under the trade name of Arkansas SKYWARN®.

About the National Weather Service Little Rock Forecast Office

In February of 1870, President Ulysses S. Grant signed a joint resolution of Congress authorizing the Secretary of War to establish a national weather service. Little Rock weather observations began a few years later in 1877 when weekly rainfall totals were reported on a volunteer basis. The first weather office opened on July 1, 1879 in the Stoddard Bank building located at Main and Markham Streets in Little Rock. This office was part of the U.S. Army Signal Corps. In 1892 the office became part of the U.S. Weather Bureau and after a number of subsequent moves was finally located in the administration building at Adams Field (Little Rock Airport) in 1942. The Little Rock Forecast Office moved to its current location at the North Little Rock Airport on December 15, 1975. More than 150 weather reports, including those for non-severe weather, were received at this office from the general public in 2009.

About the Central Arkansas Radio Emergency Net (CAREN Club)

Established in the late 1950s, the Central Arkansas Radio Emergency Net is one of the oldest Amateur Radio clubs in Arkansas and remains a state leader in public service and emergency communications. CAREN is a non-profit 501(C) 3 membership organization of Amateur Radio operators organized for the promotion of amateur radio communication, education and

experimentation. On average the club provides communications support to charitable and other non-profit organizations for 12 public service events annually. This provides Amateur Radio operators an opportunity to test and operate their equipment in a net-controlled field exercise while advancing the overall preparedness of these Amateurs to step forward as volunteers and provide emergency communications when all else fails.

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