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Photo submitted by Steve Chesler

The National Weather Service will hold a 24-hour event for ham radio operators who send in information about storms throughout the area. SKYWARN Recognition Day begins tonight at 7 o'clock, when radio operators can get information about weather-service operations and win certificates for calling into as many weather stations as possible.

Forecasters thank amateur radio operators

□ The National Weather Service relies on spotters to radio in precise weather conditions.

By TOM ADAMS
Messenger Post Staff

With no offices in Rochester or Syracuse, the National Weather Service has become more dependent than ever on local amateur radio operators to provide the latest conditions.

To encourage participation by short-wave enthusiasts, the weather service and the Amateur Radio Relay League have scheduled a 24-hour event to recognize the contributions that amateur radio operators make when severe weather strikes.

"We can see it as a radar image," weather service forecaster Bill Hibbert said. "But we need people who can tell us if it's snow or sleet or freezing rain."

The event, called SKYWARN Recognition Day, begins at 7 p.m. today and continues through 7 p.m. tomorrow. Amateur radio operators can

learn about weather-service operations and technology during that time. National Weather Service personnel, under the supervision of a licensed ham radio operator, can broadcast on the air from weather-service facilities.

Mendon resident Ed Holdsworth was actively involved with the weather service when it had offices in Rochester. An amateur radio operator for 25 years, he serves as the emergency coordinator for Monroe County and is the radio officer for the county's Office of Emergency Preparedness.

"If there's a tornado, (the weather service) can't really tell if there's a tornado, or whether or not it's touched down," said Holdsworth, who is the weather service's SKYWARN officer in this area. "They can predict snow, but they can't tell how much in any one place."

Radar and specialized technology have refined weather forecasting in recent years, and computer models are the backbone of accurate forecasts, Hibbert said. But SKYWARN spotters are the eyes

and ears in the field for the weather service, according to meteorologist Robert Hamilton.

For 24 hours beginning tonight, ham radio operators will try to contact as many weather-service offices as possible, using their own equipment. Certificates will be awarded to those who contact a specified number of offices in a particular part of the county, weather-service officials said.

A Lake Effect endorsement certificate will be issued to those who contact at least three National Weather Service offices in the Great Lakes region, which includes Buffalo; Duluth, Minn.; Gaylord, Mich.; Marquette, Mich.; and North Webster, Ind.

Last year, the Buffalo office made 800 contacts, ranking third in the country among weather-service sites, connecting with 46 states and 47 of the service's other offices, Buffalo representatives said.

"A lot of it has to do with the weather patterns here," Hibbert said. "SKYWARN operators like to get out there and help us as much as they can."

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