

# Amateur radio fans ham it up in Milton

By Adam Silverman  
Free Press Staff Writer

MILTON — It was 1991 in Croatia, the early days of the Yugoslavian civil war. Air raid sirens were wailing, bombs were rattling shelters and Christopher Roy of Newport, Vermont felt a bit as though he were there.

Roy, now 29, was talking on amateur radio — known as ham radio — with a Croatian man hiding out in a bomb shelter. The two were having a normal conversation when Roy heard the sirens sound, a faint noise coming over the airwaves.

Then, Roy said, he could hear explosion in the background. The Croatian man ended the conversation.

“It was nerve-racking and exciting at the same time,” Roy said.

For Roy, that cemented his interest in ham radio. Saturday morning, Roy and about 500 other amateur radio enthusiasts from New England and Canada gathered in Milton High School’s cafeteria for the 19<sup>th</sup> annual Milton Hamfest, a flea market and exposition of radio and other electronic gear.

Most ham operators say the allure of amateur radio is the chance to talk with people around the globe and, sometimes, even above it.

Roy and the hamfest’s organizer, Mitch Stern of Essex, have had radio conversations with Space Shuttle and Mir astronauts, they said. As amateur radio becomes more commonplace, more people try to visit with astronauts, Stern said, and that can lead to brief exchanges.

“It’s just one guy up there and 30,000 of us down here all trying to get in touch with him,” he said. “So you keep it short so as many of us can contact him as possible.”

John Suker was one of the sellers Saturday, his exhibit table stacked with radio components such as microphones, tuners and transceivers. He said business was OK for this show — the first of the year in northern New England — although it was a little slower than summer shows.

For Suker, a 57-year-old Rutland resident, his ham radio hobby is an exciting way to talk to people who live all around the world. He said he’s visited with people in more than 200 countries, including a chat with the radio operator for a team of scientists stationed in Antarctica.

In the mid-1950s, Suker said, he was on his radio when he happened to connect with a boat traveling through the Suez Canal. Suker was totally surprised when he realized he knew the man he

was taking to — a high-school classmate he hadn’t seen or spoken to in more than 20 years.

“We couldn’t believe it at first,” he said.

Stern, 48, said that even in this day of mobile phones and the Internet, people are still drawn to ham radio.

“I could sit down here in my room and turn on the radio and have a conversation with someone in England or Bosnia,” he said. “That’s one thing that attracts people.”

Saturday’s show also attracted Serge Herbert, 64, from St. Jean, Quebec, who drove to Milton just to attend the hamfest. Herbert, who got his ham radio license in 1966, said he enjoys all aspects of his hobby.

“Everything is interesting,” he said. “Building, transmitting, receiving — everything.”

## Ham radio informaton

Saturday’s Milton Hamfest was sponsored by the Radio Amateurs of Northern Vermont. For information:

■ **Phone:** 879-6589

■ **On the Web:** [www.ranv.org](http://www.ranv.org)

■ **E-mail:** [w1sj@arrl.net](mailto:w1sj@arrl.net)