

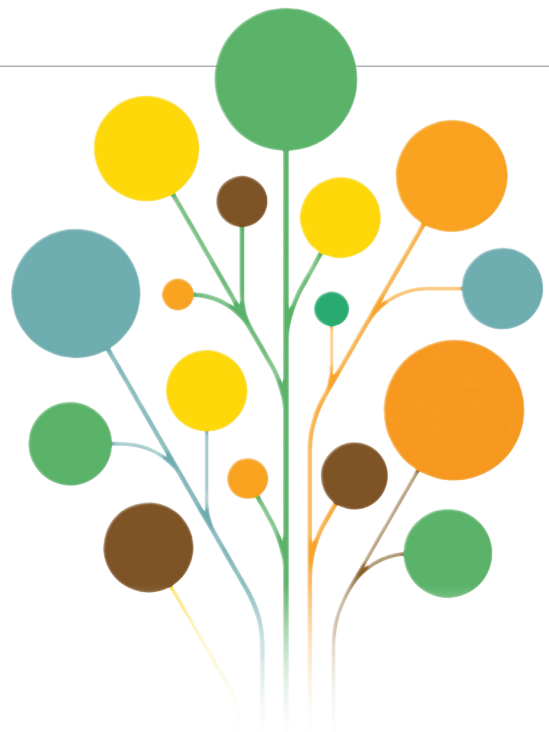
# How to Create a Boy Scout Troop of Hams

These Scouts earned their ham radio licenses to assist with emergency communications.

**Scott deMasi, KC5NKW, and David Godell, KG5VLY**

Being prepared is the goal of hams and Boy Scouts everywhere. However, sometimes you learn that you aren't as prepared for a particular situation as you thought. When Hurricane Harvey hit the Texas coast in 2017, the small community of Kingwood in northeast Houston was decimated. Large portions of the subdivision were under up to 5 feet of water for several days. Troop 839, one of the local Boy Scout troops, had a few ham radio operators who jumped into action to help the community, but the troop as a whole was unprepared due to being separated by the water.

After the storm passed and things slowly got back to normal, Assistant Scoutmaster Scott deMasi,



KC5NKW, thought it might help the community to have a trained team of ham radio-licensed Scouts in place. With the help of Assistant Scoutmaster David Godell, KG5VLY, a plan was made to increase the number of licensed hams in the troop. The troop has gone from four licensed operators to 37 (adult and youth combined), forming the Troop 839 Radio Club, KW9BSA.

## Challenges

In spring 2018, a meeting was held to see who would be interested in becoming a ham radio operator. We started with the introduction of events like JOTA (Jamboree on the Air), teaching the Radio Merit Badge, and offering demonstrations at Winter Camp, where

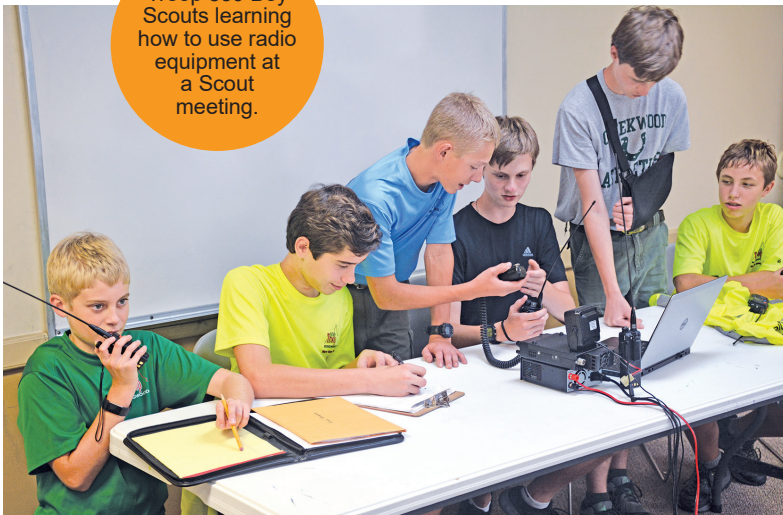
Scouts are introduced to new programs and merit badges. Interested Scouts were provided with testing dates and links to study materials. We offered to drive any Scout that wanted to take an exam to their exam location. We soon discovered that getting boys between 11 and 18 years old interested in ham radio was not an easy task. Some of the boys grew interested, but when they saw the materials to study, they quickly lost enthusiasm. Success was very slow at that point, and we gained only one licensed Scout.

Another challenge was Scout parents not knowing which radios to buy. Thankfully, the four hams who were already in the troop committed to donating a radio when Scouts got licensed. Additionally, when a Scout earned their license, they would have completed most of the requirements for the Radio Merit Badge as well. Radios then became the



The Scoutmasters and Scouts of Troop 839, KW9BSA.

Troop 839 Boy Scouts learning how to use radio equipment at a Scout meeting.



them comfortable on the air, we discussed how their radios work and the purpose of each feature. We reviewed phonetics, protocols, and basic rules. Once they were familiar with all of it, we paired them with another operator and separated them (across a parking lot). We then established a common simplex frequency, with the idea that youth are more comfortable speaking directly with someone they know, instead of through a repeater with opportunities for others to join the conversation. The Scouts then called out their call signs to one another. Once a connection was established, we helped them adjust to speaking into the microphone.

only electronic device allowed on campouts. With these three incentives, Scouts grew more enthusiastic about earning their ham radio licenses.

Now all they had to do was pass the test. The Scouts watched videos, attended classes, and received mentoring, but there was little success. We found an instructor to facilitate a full-day class, ending with the Technician-class license test. The class consisted of 8 hours of learning and studying, ending with a Volunteer Examiner (VE) testing session. Scouts, their parents, siblings, and friends were all invited to participate. The first round was very successful, with 12 Scouts and parents earning their Technician-class licenses. On subsequent testing dates, new hams were continually added.

As the group grew, we applied for a new ham club with the vanity call sign KW9BSA. All hams in the troop are automatically members. There are no dues; the only requirement is Scout participation.

### Getting Scouts On the Air

One of the unforeseen obstacles for the growing group was getting on the air. There's little information in the radio community to help new hams do so effectively. To teach skills in scouting, we use what we call the EDGE method — Explain, Demonstrate, Guide, and Enable. We followed this method to teach our Scouts ham radio.

It was a concern that the Scouts wouldn't learn enough from the 1-day class. KW9BSA started providing training classes to teach troop hams how to use their radios. To get

Once they were comfortable, we switched to using a local repeater monitored by a club member. The Scouts then made calls requesting a signal report (they always got a response). Once the response came in, they had a short conversation.

Luckily, two local groups were able to help — the South Texas ARES District 14 Northeast and Texas Emergency Amateur Communicators (TEAC). To encourage the Scouts to get into the weekly nets, they added them to the net script, stating, "If there are any Scouts listening today, please take a moment to check in. We would love to hear from you." They wait a little longer than usual to get a reply. Now, Scouts regularly check in to these nets.

During emergency communications drills, the Boy Scouts receive direction from net control.





Through service, Boy Scouts of America helped encourage youths to get on the air and become comfortable with public speaking. Hams in KW9BSA have already logged hundreds of hours providing community services that are unavailable to non-ham Scouts. In Houston, Texas, during Wreaths Across America, an event where Scouts lay remembrance wreaths on the graves of veterans, KW9BSA works with the Harris County Northeast District 14 ARES group to provide radio support. We also provided support during a triathlon, and then again at a local bike rally. During the bike rally, Troop 839 got some hands-on education, as we helped an ARES member lower his antenna tower for maintenance.

### Preparing for Emergency Communications

It was important to prepare this group of radio Scouts for emergency communications. The KW9BSA team now has regularly scheduled drills, set up as a directed net with a Net Control Operator. During these drills, Scouts are given envelopes containing scenarios of what they have witnessed or are currently experiencing. These mock scenarios are based on real-life issues that Troop 839 hams dealt with during Hurricane Harvey in 2017. These scenarios include anything from people being trapped on a roof in a flooded neighborhood to simple questions about shelter. The idea of this exercise is to let the Scouts decide what information is imperative to pass on and the next steps. Most scenarios have a second piece that either adds questions or brings the issue to a conclusion. Once all the scenarios are complete, the group meets for pizza to do an after-action discussion. Their skills have improved with every drill.

In our opinion, a good scenario is one that the Scouts can see as a tangible or realistic possibility that they could experience. All of them were aware of hurricane-related emergencies, so they know these are all things they may encounter again.

### Next Steps

The success of KW9BSA doesn't stop with Troop 839. Now that the idea has grown and is proving successful, we're working to take it to the next level through the local Scout district. The District Committee is already working with KW9BSA to expand the program. The goal is to demonstrate and share the success of KW9BSA with the other districts, strengthening communications and community service throughout the Houston area. By bringing the ham radio concept to other Scout units in the Kingwood area, not only will the Scouting community be strengthened, but the local

A Boy Scout receives advice from a Scoutmaster regarding the features on his radio.



radio club, TEAC, and the ARES group will be as well. What a tremendous success it would be to have hundreds of licensed Scouts in the area following the Scout motto to “be prepared.”

Troop 839 is sponsored by the First Presbyterian Church in Kingwood and is a member of the Flaming Arrow District in the Sam Houston Area Council. Troop 839 serves approximately 100 youth, and the Flaming Arrow District serves approximately 3,500 youth in the northeast Harris County/southeast Montgomery County area. The Sam Houston Area Council, the largest Scout council in Boy Scouts of America, serves over 46,400 youth, covering over 27 counties in south-east Texas.

All photos by the authors.

Scott deMasi, KC5NKW, is an Assistant Scoutmaster and a District Chair for Emergency Preparedness for the Boy Scouts of America Troop 839 in Kingwood, Texas. He has his General-class license and has been a radio operator since 2005. Scott serves as an Assistant Emergency Coordinator (AEC) for ARES District 14 Northeast, as well as a Volunteer Examiner. He's also the ARRL South Texas Youth Coordinator. Scott can be reached at [kc5nkw@arrl.net](mailto:kc5nkw@arrl.net).

David Godell, KG5VLY, has his Technician-class license and is an Eagle Scout for the Boy Scouts of America. David currently serves as the Committee Chair for Troop 839 and serves on the District Committee for local Scouts. He enjoys ham radio, camping, and spending time with his family. David can be reached at [davidgodell@kingwoodcable.net](mailto:davidgodell@kingwoodcable.net).

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