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Ham radio operators crowd Gateway Center

By **Scott Cousins**
Wednesday, January 30, 2008 8:35 AM CST

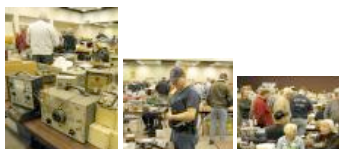
Jim Glasscock of Union, Mo., was busy setting up for a show at the Gateway Center Friday, but before that he was busy talking to people in Europe and Africa.

On Saturday, an estimated 1,500 people came to the center for the annual Winterfest Ham Radio Swap Meet, sponsored by the St. Louis and Suburban Radio Club.

The show gave ham radio enthusiasts the opportunity to buy everything they needed for their hobby, ranging from aluminum antennae poles to new computers. Glasscock, a ham radio operator for about 50 years, said people come from throughout the Midwest to look over the displays.



Scott Cousins photo - An estimated 1,500 amateur radio enthusiasts got a chance to look over aisle after aisle of radios and other equipment at the 2008 Winterfest Ham Radio Swap Meet, held Saturday at the Gateway Center in Collinsville.



"It's like a fraternity. We all have the same basic interest," he said.

However, it can be a large fraternity, and he might never have a chance to meet many of those he communicates with.

"Yesterday morning I worked five stations in Europe and two in Africa before I came over here," he said.

Richard Gould of O'Fallon is another long-time radio operator.

"I built a crystal set when I was 9 or 10. It cost \$3 and some-odd cents. I was so intrigued with it that I just had to continue," he said.

"And back in the days when I got started it was all tube radios. It was just so fascinating to be able to communicate all over the world," he said.

After getting his novice license in 1957, he made his first radio contact at 16.

"From there we lost contact for 30 years, then met again and started going to Dayton," Gould said.

Dayton, Ohio, is the home of one of the largest swap meets in the country, and several

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people referred to it as the "Mecca" of ham radio.

At another booth, Jeff Dill of Mitchell had just purchased an old citizen's band radio.

Dill has been a ham radio operator for the past 10 years, but had been interested in radios long before that.

"From childhood I've been playing with radios and taking stuff apart," he said. "It's just the camaraderie and learning."

In addition to the fun and friends, there is also a very serious side to the hobby.

Ron Przybylinski, science and operations officer for the National Weather Service in St. Louis, was at a booth promoting the service's Skywarn system of storm spotters.

"We'll be very busy over the next three or four months with the spotter program," he said. "Amateur radio is a very important part of the whole system for severe weather. They are able to feed us valuable information, particularly in the rural portions of Missouri and Illinois. They're a very good source of information."

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