

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS IN XENIA

Dayton Hamvention® 2026

The World's Greatest Amateur Radio Event Returns to Ohio

May 15 – 17, 2026 · Greene County Fair & Expo Center · Xenia, Ohio

By Michael Kalter W8CI Xenia, Ohio

Every May, tens of thousands of radio adventurers from every corner of the globe descend on a fairground in southwest Ohio to celebrate one of humanity's most enduring and electrifying pursuits. Hamvention® — officially the Dayton Hamvention®, though it has called Xenia home since 2017 — is the world's largest amateur radio gathering, and the 2026 edition promises to be the most exciting yet. With the theme of Radio Adventure, this year's event invites everyone, from the seasoned DX chaser to the curious first timer, to explore the limitless possibilities of the radio spectrum. If you have ever wondered what amateur radio is all about, or if you are a licensed ham looking to rekindle your passion and discover what's new, Xenia, Ohio, is where you need to be on May 15, 16, and 17, 2026.

Hamvention® is not a trade show or a niche convention. It is a living, breathing community — part festival, part classroom, part marketplace, and part reunion. More than 30,000 attendees and visitors from across North America and around the world gather each year at the Greene County Fair and Expo Center, transforming a quiet Ohio city into the international capital of amateur radio for one unforgettable weekend.

WHAT IS HAMVENTION®?

For those new to the hobby, Hamvention® is the annual convention organized by the Dayton Amateur Radio Association (DARA) and sponsored by a remarkable army of volunteers. Its roots run deep — the very first Hamvention® was held in 1952 at the Biltmore Hotel in Dayton, Ohio, making 2026 a celebration of more than seven decades of this cherished tradition. Inside the sprawling fairgrounds complex, attendees find more than 500 indoor commercial exhibits showcasing the latest equipment from major manufacturers and innovative small vendors, and more than 2,500 outdoor flea market spaces where buyers and sellers trade everything from brand-new transceivers to vintage tube radios and hard-to-find accessories. Multiple forum tracks run throughout the three days, covering topics from satellite communications and emergency preparedness to digital modes and antenna

design. FCC license exams are offered on-site. Live demonstrations, prize drawings, and special event stations make every hour feel packed with possibility.

AMATEUR RADIO IN 2026: A HOBBY TRANSFORMED

Amateur radio has never been more alive. As of early 2026, the FCC reports more than 736,000 active individual amateur radio licenses in the United States alone, and globally, over three million licensed operators are active across more than 160 countries. The International Amateur Radio Union (IARU), founded in Paris on April 18, 1925, now represents member societies on every inhabited continent, and the 2026 World Amateur Radio Day theme — Advancing the Spirit of Amateur Radio Through Innovation — captures the restless energy driving the community forward.

The hobby has evolved dramatically in recent years. Digital modes like FT8 rewrote what “weak signal” communication means, allowing operators to make transcontinental contacts with just a few watts of power. Experimental modes like FT2 are already being discussed in labs and forum threads. Software-defined radios (SDRs) have put sophisticated spectrum analysis tools in the hands of anyone with a laptop. Mesh networking on VHF and UHF bands is enabling hams to build their own internet-independent communication infrastructure. Machine-learning-assisted decoders are pushing the boundaries of what the human ear — or any radio — can resolve from noise. And Parks on the Air (POTA), an activity that barely existed a decade ago, has exploded into a global phenomenon with tens of thousands of activators setting up portable stations in parks, forests, and wilderness areas around the world.

These innovations are on full display at Hamvention®. Whether you want to hold the latest Software Defined Radio in your hands, talk to an engineer designing the next generation of amateur satellites, or watch a live POTA activation from the fairgrounds, 2026’s event is where the cutting edge of the hobby comes to meet you.

A HOBBY WITHOUT AGE, WITHOUT BORDERS

One of the most remarkable things about amateur radio is how completely it transcends the boundaries that divide so much of modern life — age, nationality, background, and language. At Hamvention®, you will find ten-year-olds who just passed their Technician exam standing next to eighty-year-old Extra class operators who have been on the air for six decades. You will hear accents from Brazil, Japan, Germany, Australia, and dozens of other nations. The language of radio — the universal exchange of signal reports, call signs, and camaraderie — cuts through every barrier.

Youth engagement in amateur radio is surging. Globally, organizations like Youngsters on the Air (YOTA) run camps and contests specifically designed for licensed operators under the age of 26, drawing participants from Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia. The World Organization of the Scout Movement's annual Jamboree on the Air is the largest scouting activity on earth, with roughly half a million Scouts and Guides making radio contacts each October. The World Wide Young Contesters organization brings competitive radio sport to young Europeans. And closer to home, the ARRL's Youth on the Air camp program, held annually in North America, draws licensed young operators from across the Western Hemisphere for a week of hands-on training, cutting-edge operating, and mentorship.

At Hamvention® 2026, the ARRL Youth Rally on Saturday, May 16, is designed for students ages 11 to 21 and offers a hands-on afternoon of satellite communications, a sprint contest, a fox hunt, and the chance to make contact with a parachute-mobile station. Registration is just \$20 and includes a T-shirt, badge and lanyard, reusable tote bag, and a complimentary three-day Hamvention® admission ticket. It is one of the best single investments a young ham — or a parent of a curious kid — can make.

One of the most beloved and enduring youth traditions at Hamvention® is the Radio Club of America (RCA) Youth Forum, a Saturday morning institution that has run for more than three decades. Founded and long moderated by legendary amateur radio educator Carole Perry, WB2MPG — a Fellow and Director of the Radio Club of America, past Hamvention® Ham of the Year, and recipient of the ARRL Instructor of the Year Award — the RCA Youth Forum is unlike anything else at the event. Each year, seven to eleven carefully selected young ham radio operators, some as young as nine or ten years old, take the stage to deliver polished presentations on their accomplishments, experiments, and passions within the hobby. Past presenters have spoken on topics ranging from satellite communications and high-altitude ballooning to digital radio modes, antenna homebrew, emergency preparedness, and promoting ham radio in their schools and communities around the world.

The RCA Youth Forum is open to all Hamvention® attendees and is consistently one of the most inspiring sessions of the entire weekend. The young presenters — who earn the honored title of RCA Young Achievers — receive recognition, prizes, and networking opportunities that often launch lifelong careers and friendships in radio and technology. Sponsors including Icom America have long supported the forum, providing presenters with equipment gifts and personalized recognition. Perry, who taught “Introduction to Amateur Radio” for nearly thirty years at a New York middle school, has said it best: “The Youth Forum is where we showcase our best and brightest young hams. Come support the future of our hobby and service!” For anyone who wonders whether the next generation is embracing amateur radio, an hour in the RCA Youth Forum will answer that question beyond any doubt.

Internationally, Hamvention® draws visitors from dozens of countries every year. It is the event where a ham from Poland might swap antenna-building techniques with an operator from Japan, where a British contesters share foxhunting tips with a Brazilian DXer, and where the global community of radio adventurers feels, for three days, like a single neighborhood.

At Hamvention®, the global amateur radio community becomes one neighborhood — ten-year-olds, eighty-year-olds, and everyone between them, speaking the universal language of radio.

NEW & EXCITING ACTIVITIES SHOWCASED AT HAMVENTION® 2026

Hamvention® is the best place in the world to discover what is happening right now in amateur radio, and 2026’s lineup reflects a hobby in the midst of a genuine renaissance. Here is a sample of what awaits:

Parks on the Air (POTA). The POTA phenomenon has transformed how hams think about portable operating. Across multiple dedicated forums and live outdoor demonstrations, attendees can learn how to set up a field station anywhere from a city park to a remote wilderness, make contacts with stations around the world, and log activations toward awards and achievements. POTA forums at Hamvention® routinely fill large indoor spaces — a testament to how much excitement the activity has generated.

Satellite Communications. AMSAT, the Radio Amateur Satellite Corporation, presents an annual forum and exhibit covering the current status of amateur satellites in orbit, upcoming launches, and how any ham with a modest handheld radio can make contacts via low-Earth orbit birds. The 2026 ARRL

Youth Rally will feature live satellite communication demonstrations, giving young attendees a chance to make contact through a bird hundreds of miles overhead.

Emergency Communications. Hamvention® has always taken seriously amateur radio's vital role in emergency preparedness. Forums and exhibits cover ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Service), mesh networking for disaster communication, and the latest digital tools that help hams provide communications when commercial infrastructure fails. This is radio that saves lives — and Hamvention® is where the people who do this work share what they know.

Software-Defined Radio and Digital Modes. SDR technology has made it possible for anyone to explore the radio spectrum in ways previously reserved for engineers with expensive equipment. Exhibitors and forum presenters will showcase the latest SDR platforms, discuss emerging digital modes, and demonstrate how machine learning is beginning to assist in signal identification and decoding.

Special Event Station. Throughout the weekend, a special event station operates on the air from the Hamvention® grounds, giving visitors the thrill of making contacts from one of the most famous call signs in the world during the most famous radio weekend of the year.

FCC License Exams On-Site. One of Hamvention®'s most practical offerings is the opportunity to sit for your FCC amateur radio license exam right at the fairgrounds. Whether you are a first-timer going for your Technician ticket or an operator upgrading to General or Amateur Extra, volunteer examiners are on-site all three days to administer the test.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION: HAMVENTION® 2026

- **Dates:** Friday, May 15 – Sunday, May 17, 2026
- **Hours:** Friday & Saturday: 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM · Sunday: 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM
- **Location:** Greene County Fair & Expo Center, 120 Fairground Road, Xenia, Ohio 45385
- **GPS / Navigation:** Latitude 39.7021, Longitude -83.9420
- **Gate Admission:** \$30 per person (one ticket covers all three days — Friday through Sunday)
- **Sunday Admission:** FREE — Sunday, May 17 is free admission for all attendees
- **Children 12 & Under:** Free with a ticketed adult, no ticket required

- **Students (Jr. High – High School):** Free ticket available at the Will Call window
- **ARRL Youth Rally:** \$20 registration (Saturday, May 16) — includes 3-day admission, T-shirt, badge & tote
- **Parking:** Free parking included with all admission tickets
Email: info@hamvention.org
- **Website:** hamvention.org

TEN COMPELLING REASONS TO ATTEND HAMVENTION® 2026

Still on the fence? Here is why no radio enthusiast — or anyone curious about radio — should miss this event:

1. The World's Best Radio Flea Market. Over 2,500 outdoor vendor spaces offer everything from brand-new transceivers to vintage tube equipment, antennas, cables, test gear, and parts that simply do not exist anywhere else. If you are looking for something specific, the Hamvention® flea market is where you will find it.

2. 500+ Indoor Exhibits. Every major manufacturer of amateur radio equipment sets up indoors, allowing you to hold, test, and compare radios, antennas, amplifiers, and accessories before you buy. Hamvention® is where new products are often announced and launched.

3. Expert Forums and Presentations. Dozens of forum sessions cover everything from satellite operations and contesting to antenna theory, digital modes, emergency communications, and the science of radio propagation. Attend a morning session and come away with knowledge that would take months to accumulate from books.

4. Get Your Ham License Right There. Volunteer examiners offer FCC Technician, General, and Amateur Extra class exams on-site all three days. There is no better setting to take the plunge and join the community.

5. Sunday Is Free. Not sure if you want to commit to the full weekend? Show up Sunday, May 17 (9:00 AM – 1:00 PM) for zero cost. Browse the flea market, explore the exhibits, and get a taste of the world's greatest ham radio gathering at absolutely no charge.

6. Incredible Value. A \$30 gate ticket buys you admission for all three days, including all forums, all exhibits, the flea market, the prize drawing, and free parking. There is no separate charge for any of the educational programming.

7. A Truly International Experience. Hamvention® draws visitors from dozens of countries. You will meet hams from Japan, Germany, Brazil, Australia, Poland, and beyond. The friendships formed in the aisles of the flea market and the seats of the forum rooms are the heart of the global amateur radio family.

8. Youth Programming That Inspires. The ARRL Youth Rally on Saturday is a highlight of the weekend, offering young operators and curious students a hands-on afternoon of satellite contacts, fox hunts, sprint contests, and community. Children 12 and under are always free, and student tickets through high school are also free at the gate.

9. The Dayton Area Is Worth the Trip. Xenia sits between Columbus, Cincinnati, and Dayton, with easy access from three airports. While you are in the area, the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force in Dayton — the world’s largest aviation museum, open daily and completely free — is a short drive away. The Dayton Art Institute and historic Carillon Park are also nearby.

10. You Will Leave Inspired. More than anything else, Hamvention® changes the way you see the hobby. The energy of 30,000 enthusiastic people who share your passion, the sight of new technology that excites your imagination, the conversation with a fellow operator from the other side of the world — these are experiences that no online purchase or YouTube video can replicate.

COME FIND YOUR FREQUENCY IN XENIA

Amateur radio is one of the few pursuits that is simultaneously a technical discipline, a community service, a competitive sport, a scientific tool, and a deeply personal creative outlet. It spans age groups and national borders with an ease that few human endeavors can match. And three times a year, for one May weekend in Ohio, it all comes together in a way that simply has to be experienced.

Whether you are a licensed ham who has attended for thirty years or a curious newcomer who just discovered what a radio can do, Hamvention® 2026 has something for you. Come early. Stay late. Walk every aisle. Sit in on a forum. Say hello to a stranger with a call sign badge and a smile. And on Sunday morning, if you haven’t made up your mind yet, walk through the gates for free. The adventure is waiting. And it begins in Xenia.

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Tickets & Information: hamvention.org · info@hamvention.org · Gate Price: \$30 (3-day) · Sunday: FREE

73 — Good luck, and we'll see you on the air.