

Before there was an Internet, before we ever knew what "www" meant, even before Bill Gates took his first baby steps, Paul Oldecker was listening to and directing on-line chat groups. Not with computers, but with ham radios. Oldecker has been a licensed operator since the age of 22. Now retired both from the Army and Marine Corps, he is a member of MARS, military affiliates radio system.

As part of MARS, he monitors and sends communications through radio transmissions about 3 times a day. This means at assigned times he signs on to a preset frequency from his home and transmits pieces of "traffic" he has received to others across the network. After all the traffic has been taken care of, operators go for a round of informal comments.

"Someone may tell us about his day, or about a piece of news, even about a doctor's appointment," says Oldecker, making it sound much like today's modern day chat rooms on the Internet.

Now, Oldecker has found a way to blend the tried and true technology of ham radio with the Internet's baby boomer technology. Two or three times a week he finds himself in the Estill County Technology Center taking advantage of The Center for Rural Development's CenterNet, a regional network of

new telecommunications capabilities that The Center is bringing to Southern and Eastern Kentucky. This wide-area network features high quality video-conferencing and Internet services. There are currently twenty-two approved CenterNet sites in The Center's 40-county region.

While Oldecker doesn't have his own personal computer, he has found one can be invaluable in his "MARS mission." He has a free e-mail account set up at Estill's CenterNet location. After most visits he takes away 20 to 30 pieces of e-mail in which people contact him and ask him to transmit their messages by radio, usually overseas, to military personnel.

"Some radio operators like computers and some don't," says Oldecker. "But the people who make use of e-mail are the ones who get all the radio traffic."

"It's been a real treat to see people who aren't your typical computer users come into this facility," says Todd Denham, former president of the Estill County Development Alliance, who partnered with The Center to operate Estill's CenterNet site.

"CenterNet has given Paul the avenue to take his lifelong interest to the next level. That's the exciting thing about CenterNet, watching people apply the technology to their own lives."

# for MARS

through a partnership with the estill county development alliance and THE CENTER, the estill centernet location is helping retired military man paul oldecker make unique connections between old and new technology