

Spotlight – Craig Gaines K3CDG

From Neighborhood Prep to HF: My Journey into Amateur Radio

My introduction to amateur radio started close to home. My wife, Nicole, has served as our neighborhood's Emergency Preparedness coordinator for many years. In the summer of 2025, she asked if I would be willing to step in and help. As part of that effort, she found a ham radio preparation class hosted by Orem City and encouraged me to attend. I agreed, and that decision quickly turned into something much bigger than I expected.

I attended my first class in September, taught by Joe Costello (WH6QV). His enthusiasm and practical approach immediately sparked my interest in amateur radio. At the end of the session, he recommended using HamStudy.org as a primary tool for preparing for the license exam, along with supplemental learning from YouTube.

I took that advice seriously. The very next day, I dove into online videos and began working through practice questions on HamStudy. After several hours of focused study, I felt ready, and the following day, I passed my Technician exam, receiving my first callsign: KM7CKN. Encouraged by that success, I repeated the same process and, within a week, passed my General exam as well.

By December, I decided to push further and pursue my Amateur Extra license. This time, the material required more effort and persistence. After a couple of attempts, I passed the exam just after Christmas. Shortly thereafter, I applied for and received my vanity callsign: K3CDG.

Another piece of advice I received early on was to join a local club. Through Joe, I discovered the Utah Valley Amateur Radio Club (UVARC) and became a member. Around the same time, I connected with a colleague through the Sheriff's Office who introduced me to Utah County Amateur Radio Emergency Service (UCARES). Through that connection, I met Gavin Grow K9GKG, who helped me get started with equipment, including programming my first handheld, the Baofeng UV-5R for local UHF/VHF use.

As I built out my shack, I added a BTECH UV-25X4 and eventually turned my attention to HF. I purchased a Yaesu FT-891 and quickly discovered that antennas would be my biggest challenge. After several months of trial and error, I settled on a Radioddity HF-009 for my current setup. I'm still working toward a permanent multi-band antenna solution for the shack.



HF operation has become a major focus for me, particularly programs like Parks on the Air (POTA) and digital modes such as FT8. While I clearly see the value of amateur radio in emergency communications, I've also come to appreciate it as an incredibly rewarding hobby.

With over 30 years in law enforcement, I've seen firsthand how chaotic emergency situations can become. Amateur radio offers a way to stay prepared, build practical skills, and contribute meaningfully when it matters most, all while enjoying the learning process along the way.

Craig is a member of UARC, UVARC, and UCARES, among others.

– 73, Craig

