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Emergency exercise for communication is held

Amateur radio group to help in crisis situation

Lee County Amateur Radio Emergency Services held a successful emergency communication exercise in Lee County on Saturday, May 30.

This exercise focused on mapping direct communications via amateur radio in Lee County and deployment, setup, use portable radios and antennas.

"If our law enforcement radio system goes out and the Internet goes down, this group can place people out in the field all over the county to keep our communications flowing during an emergency," said Sheriff Rodney Meyer.

LeeCARES members

were able to successfully communicate, directly or via relays, without a repeater, in an area spanning from Caldwell to Smithville, and Georgetown and Jonah, from Bartlett to South Austin.

"LeeCARES members increased their knowledge of the portable radios and were able to successfully resolve issues. This exercise boosted enthusiasm and confidence to be able to communicate throughout the Lee County and beyond in case the regular means of communications fails during an emergency or disaster," said Marida del Core Borromeo, a representative for the group.

"Our members became aware that portable radio antennas need to be raised higher above the ground, for better communications. As a consequence of this exercise, one of our members has developed a prototype that was operational by the next day. Improvements are being made to ease the antenna setup," she said.

"I also want to thank God for leading and blessing our work, and we ask for His help as we continue to improve and grow," said Marida.

LeeCARES next steps:

- Increase antenna height while still maintaining

See Exercise, 8

EXERCISE

(FROM PAGE ONE)

a single person to set up within three minutes.

- Develop a method to erect an efficient antenna at the Lee County Emergency Operation Center or any location that may be used as a Command Post.

- Future exercises are planned.

Four Lee County operators participated -- two from their base stations in their homes and two from their two personal vehicles with portable radios and handhelds. Furthermore, about ten operators from four adjacent counties, Williamson, Burleson, Bastrop, and Travis, checked in and relayed messages. The exercise lasted 4 hours. The Lee County Amateur Radio Emergency Service® (LeeCARES) is sponsored by the American Radio Relay League. The purpose of LeeCARES is to furnish emergency communication when regular communication fails or is inadequate during natural or man-made disasters. LeeCARES consists of licensed amateurs who have voluntarily registered their qualifications and equipment, with their local ARES leadership, for communications duty in the public service when disaster strikes.

Exercises an eye-opener

"The exercise with The American Red Cross was an eye opener for us at LeeCARES," said Marida.

"We are thrilled to have been invited to participate. It seems only yesterday when in March 2019 Lee County and Williamson County Offices of Emergency Management and Lee County and Williamson County ARES came together at the Lee County Sheriff's Office to demonstrate the use of amateur radio to communicate with emergency services when normal communication methods are interrupted."

Today LeeCARES has grown to 10 members, six of which reside in the County, and have been already able to successfully communicate, directly or via relays, without a repeater, in an area spanning from Caldwell to Smithville, and Georgetown and Jonah, from Bartlett to South Austin.

The American Red Cross -ARES exercise simulated a coordinated cyberattack on critical electrical transmission control stations. We were asked to transmit American Red Cross forms and messages via Winlink to and from simulated shelters and Disaster Operation Center (DOC), totally without internet and cell phones.

Winlink provides worldwide radio email using radio pathways where the internet is not present, and is capable of operating completely without the internet, allowing radio operators email with attachments, position reporting, weather and

information bulletins, and is well-known for its role in interoperable emergency and disaster relief communications.

The purpose was to provide shelter communications to State and Red Cross headquarters for supplies and food for the sheltered, when normal communications were rendered useless.

LeeCARES simulated a shelter and the Disaster Operation Center in Lee County and transmitted successfully messages to the Texas State Operation Center and to Williamson County DOC.

ARES has a national Memorandum of Understanding with The American Red Cross to provide support communications in times of disaster and failed infrastructure, such as hurricanes, tornados, wide scale floods, etc.

LeeCARES welcomes licensed operators who are interested in emergency communication. LeeCARES is a 501 (c) and accepts donations to acquire equipment to improve their possibilities to reach out in case of disaster. For more information please visit LeeCARES.org.