

Amateur Radio Makes the Connection to Save Lives in Wisconsin and Idaho

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The following two rescue stories are great examples of why amateur radio is important. The first story occurred in Wisconsin and is told by ARRL member Scott Strecker, KG9IV. In his own words, Strecker shares how he was able to help a ham in distress. Thanks to the Chippewa Valley Amateur Radio Club in Wisconsin, an ARRL Affiliated Club, for this information.

"It was Friday, September 2, 2022, which meant I worked from my home office. I have the VHF radios on low to monitor them in the background. Recently, I got into the Allstar node with a hotspot. I use it to monitor the FM38 systems (Allstar 2495) in the southern [part] of Wisconsin.

At about 7:45 AM, I heard the Allstar node come up. An individual in distress was asking for assistance to get an ambulance to him. It was a ham in Brown Deer, Wisconsin. He had slipped on his bathroom floor and went down so hard he could not get up, but he happened to have his handheld with him (don't we all). He did not have access [to the] phone, and he lived alone.

[KG9IV called the] Brown Deer police call center. The dispatcher got the fire department rolling and then started asking me for more details. I had the dispatcher on speaker phone, and he could hear the hams' responses to the questions. Being on a handheld and [lying] prone, the signal was, at times, noisy. At that time, both the other ham and I used ITU phonetics to get the exact info out. All those times practicing on the ARES® nets made it second nature. The dispatcher was also able to understand the info without my having to repeat it.

It felt good to help out. I also realized it was due to my monitoring that I was able to hear his call. If you are not participating in the weekly local ARES net, I would encourage you to do so when you can."

In addition to Strecker's story, newly licensed amateur radio operators Shannon Vore, KK7GVG, and CJ Bouchard, KK7GNG, also shared a rescue story. On September 3, 2022, in the Rocky Mountains in northwest Idaho, they were out for a weekend of four-wheeling in their Jeep. The area is an extremely mountainous region with no towns, very few people, no facilities, and no cell phone coverage. The nearest airfield is Horse Haven Trail, an unimproved dirt strip that's severely eroded and covered with rocks and debris.

At about 4:30 PM, Vore and Bouchard were taking a break when an approaching truck notified them of an ATV accident involving two teenage girls. The accident scene was just a few miles away, and when they arrived it was clear the teenagers were critically injured. Bouchard was unable to contact several local repeaters, but was finally able to make contact using a simplex frequency (146.420 MHz) that's popular with the hams in Coeur d'Alene, 20 miles from the accident site.

While Bouchard and an off-duty Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) were administering medical aid to the teenagers, Vore took over radio operations. The call for emergency assistance was picked up by local amateur radio operator John Tappero, K7JNT, who immediately called 911 and asked that 146.420 MHz be used only for emergency traffic. For nearly 2 hours, Vore and Tappero provided relay between the 911 dispatcher, advising the condition of the injured and the approaching weather. Life Flight Network was

unable to respond because of a severe thunderstorm immediately over the rescue site.

Two teams of EMT's were dispatched, but due to the mountains and the storm, they couldn't communicate with dispatch. Tappero continued to provide relay information for all parties until 6:00 PM, when the EMT's arrived. The teenagers were in stable condition and immediately transported to the nearest hospital. Today, they're in good condition and recovering.

"It took us about 2 days to wind down from the experience," said Vore. "We are both glad we had our amateur radio licenses and were able to help."

Bouchard said that they had been using radios on the General Mobile Radio System (GMRS), but have since upgraded their licenses for more operating privileges. "Because the area signals were not good, it was difficult to communicate," he continued. "So, we studied, took our exams, and are now looking forward to much more amateur radio opportunities."

Both Vore and Bouchard are now looking to join a local amateur radio club and become involved in the ARRL Amateur Radio Emergency Services® (ARES®).

--Thanks to ARRL Idaho Section Manager Dan Marler, K7REX, and Idaho Assistant Section Manager Ed Stuckey, AI7H, for their help with the Idaho rescue story.

