Rick Palm, K1CE, k1ce@arrl.org

VOAD — Another Way to Serve

Besides ARES and MARS, hams can work directly with our partner services to support disaster efforts.

If you've been involved with disaster response in any capacity, you have probably heard of the VOAD movement. VOAD stands for Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters. It is guided by four core principles of cooperation, communication, coordination, and collaboration. National VOAD is a coalition of America's most reputable organizations (faith-based, community-based, and other non-government organizations). Below the national organization are VOAD chapters for the 50 states and six US territories. ARES® has been a member since the early 1980s.

National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

COOPERATION | COMMUNICATION | COORDINATION | COLLABORATION

ARRL® has had formal relationships with other National VOAD members, such as the American Red Cross and Salvation Army, for many years. The ARRL often works with other National VOAD members through less formal partnerships.

The state and territory VOADs offer a unique opportunity for Amateur Radio. State and territory VOAD membership is generally open to any volunteer organization that would be active in a disaster, and which has representation throughout their respective state. Many are state bodies of larger national programs, for example, the Red Cross, at the regional level, is represented on state VOADs.

Amateur Radio also has a seat at this table, if we choose to take advantage of it. ARRL section leadership is the starting point to make sure we're part of the conversation long before a disaster happens. When a section's leadership is part of their state VOAD, we have a chance to network with other VOAD leaders (remember, ARRL is a VOAD), learn about training and volunteer opportunities, and be ready to offer the services of the Amateur Radio community to our partners.

The opportunity to be involved with the VOAD movement isn't just for the section leadership. There are broad groups of VOADs representing a wide range of interests; organizations of former military members, faith-based organizations, and professional interest organizations, just to name a few. For some amateurs who want to serve, traditional programs such as ARES® or MARS may not be a good fit. VOADs offer another avenue for service. Perhaps a member of your club is active in his or her local Methodist Church; the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) may be a good match for his or her Amateur Radio skills and willingness to serve.

VOADs represent a wide range of potential partners for Amateur Radio, but to learn their needs requires that hams involve themselves in their operations. ARRL encourages section leadership to be active in their state VOAD and share news on what the VOAD members are doing with their section's Amateur Radio groups.

Information on the National VOAD, including contact information for your state's VOAD, is available at **www.nvoad.org**. Also, if you're in the Minneapolis area this May 22 – 25, consider attending the National VOAD Conference. — *Mike Corey, KI1U, ARRL Emergency Preparedness Manager*

Basic Public Service Operating

Make your station portable and flexible for emergency operation. Change your power connectors to your local public service operating standard; most operators employ Anderson Powerpole connectors for standardization (**www.andersonpower.com**). We will cover this topic in next month's column. Make it a hobby within a hobby to prepare your station for field operation.

Last month's column addressed your first radio — a handheld transceiver. Before taking to the field, a more demanding operating environment, consider purchasing a mobile FM transceiver, which has tens of watts output versus the handheld's 5.

You can set up both mobile and home configurations for the one radio. For the car, use a magnetic mount or permanent ⅝ wavelength whip antenna and connection to the vehicle's battery. For a home/base station, a 12 V dc supply and vertical antenna mounted on the roof will do it. You now can easily transfer the rig between home and vehicle, allowing instant flexibility for public service applications.

When faced with severe weather situations, be prepared to take down and raise antennas quickly and safely. Outdoor antennas, of course, are up in the air, exposed to wind and falling branches, trees, and power lines. It's fairly easy to remove/replace vertical VHF and UHF antennas as they are relatively small compared to their HF counterparts. For HF operation, consider using simple wire dipole antennas. Rig them using three trees, for example: the tree in the middle supports the balun, and the two end trees support the two limb wires of the dipole. If you have only one tree to work with, consider putting up your dipole in an inverted V fashion. Some basics on wire antennas can be found at **www.arrl.org/files/file/Technology/tis/info/pdf/0683033.pdf**.

Use a simple support system of ropes, eye bolts, and carabiners. Shoot thin guide ropes over branches with a bow and arrow

(the most effective means I've seen), using safety precautions, then pull through the antenna support lines. The antenna can be taken down or put up in a matter of minutes.

Minimal Communications

When you are on assignment in a disaster area or a checkpoint on a marathon course where medical emergencies can occur, don't transmit unless absolutely necessary, and then only with the permission of net control, if a net operation, or the Emergency Coordinator (EC) or Incident Commander (IC) in charge, if not on a net. Critical stations deployed in such areas may have weak signals from suboptimal locations and/or compromised radios, power sources, and antennas. They talk, you listen; you respond only when indicated. Also, maintain a strict monitoring discipline: If it is your assignment to listen for other stations on a specific frequency, focus on it 100%. A life may depend on it. If you have to leave your post for a break, have another operator cover the radio for you.

Listen to your local pre-established frequencies for emergency/disaster communications, or public event frequencies to be used. Not hearing anything? Check your VFO — perhaps you bumped it off frequency. Check your antenna — perhaps it became disconnected. Raise your handheld over your head — hear anything now?

Authenticate all messages (they should be written and signed by an official). Don't "broadcast," as some neophyte operators tend to do under the stress of an emergency/disaster situation.

Connecticut Hams Cover the Bloomin Metric Bike Ride

On June 1, the Stamford Amateur Radio Association (SARA) and Greater Norwalk Amateur Radio Club (GNARC) joined forces to provide communications coverage for the 2014 Bloomin Metric, a 2500+ rider charity bicycle ride in Fairfield County, Connecticut. The clubs fielded 23 radio operators to provide communications for net control, rest areas/food stops, SAG (support and gear) wagons, and "scout" cars, as well as staffing the telephone help lines set up for riders to call in case of problems. Net control had full dispatch authority over the vehicles, and the vehicles handled over 50 response calls, ranging from assistance with flat tires to taking possession of a rider's bicycle and gear after he was injured in an accident. In addition, the vehicles provided

Some of the Bloomin Metric volunteers, including (left to right) Sam, NV1P, president of GNARC; Jon, WB2RYV, president of SARA; Jon, W3EIC; Terry, WA1JBO; Mike, KA1EOU; Steve, KB1YLQ; Doug, KB1UKC; Marilyn, KB1YYO, and Chris, KB1QXR.

information to event management and local police as to location and density of riders along the routes.

In order to provide communications over all routes (25 mile, 75 km, 100 km), a temporary cross-band repeater was set up to relay comms from the northern end of the course back to the main repeater, which was located near the southern end of the course.

In addition to SARA and GNARC hams, hams from the Fairfield Amateur Radio Association (FARA) and the Greater Bridgeport Amateur Radio Club (GBARC) served, as well as licensed hams from Stamford CERT, Wilton CERT, and Fairfield CERT.

This was the 38th annual Bloomin Metric, and ham radio has been associated with the event for close to 20 years. This year marked a major change as the Bloomin Metric incorporated another local charity ride — something that event leadership felt was made possible in part by the assistance they've received from ham radio.

Lake Amateur Radio Association Hams Support The 41st Mt Dora Bicycle Festival

The Lake Amateur Radio Associations activated the Amateur Radio Emergency Service of Lake County Florida in support of the 41st Annual Mount Dora Bicycle Festival in Mount Dora, Florida from October 9 – 11, 2015. The ham radio operators provided radio communications from each rest area, as well as mobile radio units to patrol the various bicycle routes.

The Mount Dora Bicycle Festival is sponsored each year by the Mount Dora Chamber of Commerce and attracts bicycle riders from all over the country, but predominantly from Florida. This is not a competitive race, but a series of 12 separate bicycle tours of Florida's scenic Lake County countryside. The longest ride is 100 miles and the shortest is 12 miles. Riders choose which rides they want to take each day. This year, 1325 people signed up to ride in the festival.

This year, the hams' radio-equipped mobile vehicles transported 30 riders and their bicycles back to the starting area over the 3-day period, due to mechanical breakdowns, medical issues, or fatigue. Hams assisted with five medical problems, as well as 16 situations that required assistance from the mobile radio vehicles but were handled in the field and did not require transportation.

The Lake County ARES group used one of their repeaters on the frequency of 147.255 MHz to run the net keeping track of the rest area locations and the mobile radios units. They used the call sign of N4FLA and assigned all operators tactical signs.

Lake County ARES and LARA have been providing on-course radio communications for the Mount Dora Bicycle Festival for almost 25 years. They use situations such as this to train their members to be ready to deploy and set up emergency radio equipment in case of natural disasters such as hurricanes or tornados, which are not unusual in this area. They also get training on how to properly communicate on emergency radio networks.

For more information about Amateur Radio activities in Lake County Florida, visit **www.k4fc.org**.

Carl Depoy, K8BBT, and Strait Hollis, KT4YA, the event coordinator for ARES, confer on routes to be patrolled. [Ted Luebbers, K1AYZ, photo]