

***PUBLIC SERVICE and SPECIAL EVENT
ACTIVITIES of BAARC as SIGNIFICANT
COMMUNITY SUPPORT and MEMBER
PROFICIENCY TRAINING***

Introduction

Over many years, more than 40, the Brainerd Area Amateur Radio Club (BAARC) has been a part of the greater Brainerd lakes community. The members have done this by continually operating the club in the public interest by providing regular meetings, face-to-face, and over-the-air, to further the club activities and extend the club's vision to all interested persons. Club radio communications activities have supported a wide variety of community organizations engaged in non-profit and/or public services. Members have used their own equipment and/or operated the club's radios and computers to provide administrative and public safety information in support of specific activity.

General

In 2009, BAARC club members volunteered their time in support of other organizations engaged in community activities such as: the Jaycees Ice Fishing Contest in January which involved over 10 thousand participants and their Marathon in April which attracted several hundred runners and public spectators; during the Mid-Minnesota Dog Sled Race in February members kept track of the progress of all the teams by accounting for each at several checkpoints along the 65-mile course; in June and September radio operators provided logistic and public safety radio services to two community based bicycling clubs assisting them in their day-long activities; and on Halloween in October the club provides direct communications support to the law enforcement agencies in Crow Wing County to reduce the threat of and/or report vandalism and other inappropriate community activity.

This club activity has its benefit in at least two ways: first, in adding to the served organization's ability to run or operate their event and secondly, to provide BAARC members with training in operating under wide and varied conditions that would simulate what could be anticipated to happen in a community communications emergency such as a loss of 9-1-1 service where a separate link to the 9-1-1 answering point would be established using ham radio operators and their equipment. It also could be handling health and welfare messages for displaced persons as the result of a natural disaster and/or the activation of emergency shelters. Member participation in each of the above mentioned events supports the development of communications skills needed in the event of an emergency call-out.

Other BAARC activities have similar usefulness in the way they engage operators and various types of equipment. These include those activities that mix social interaction with the communications tasks such as: annual Field Day where for a 24-hour period club and member stations operate under simulated emergency conditions with the public invited to attend and observe; Crosby Mines pick-up day where members are able to return to the state DNR some work picking up trash in return for use of the beautiful Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area; the annual club sponsored Hamfest where many amateurs from all over our area gather to meet one another, buy and sell equipment, and have an opportunity to be tested by designated volunteer FCC examiners; and, other purely social activities like the Saturday morning breakfasts held about twice each month and the annual spring dinner along with the late summer picnic and hidden transmitter hunt.

Other BAARC activities include: FCC amateur license classes for entry-level technicians, mid-level general class, and the extra class license for those interested in going that far for full-privileges; participation in SKYWARN weather spotting activities is one of the oldest club public service dating back to the 1970's according to club records. This activity is sponsored by the National Weather Service and is directed, in this area, from their Duluth office. The APRS capability that many BAARC members have has aided SKYWARN weather spotting as it is read-out in Duluth enabling their personnel to direct hams activity in the field to produce more accurate results and get them quicker.

As a result of having so many BAARC members willing to participate in these and other club activities not mentioned, and achieving a high level of interest in emergency communication services the BAARC executive board of directors took action this past year to formalize its relationship with the ARRL in the area recommending appointment of a county Emergency Communications Coordinator. John Luce, WØWY received this appointment. His role will be to continue to liaison with Crow Wing County emergency management services personnel and keep our readiness at the EOC, and with the communications supervisor at the 911 law enforcement, and to also organize and coordinate our efforts in planning and participating at the regional, state and national levels under the ARRL's ARES, or Amateur Radio Emergency Service, plans.

One of the prime training activities for the club and one of the most important ones will be the continuation of club NET activities particularly the rotation of net control operators. This on-the-air experience gives operators critical skills when it comes to organizing and implementing important tools of information handling and connecting with public service organizations. Those agencies depending upon BAARC services include: Crow Wing County Emergency Management, Crow Wing County Law Enforcement Communications; and Crow Wing County Public Health Department; St. Joseph's Medical Center; all other surrounding hospitals; Brainerd Fire Department along with all other surrounding fire departments; the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and the National Weather Service to name just a few. As you know we have written protocols with many of these agencies and more are currently under development.

So you see all BAARC activity is not just for fun but has a more serious underlying meaning as well in the way of emergency services preparation.