

ONLY IN THE VILLAGES

By Luke Sara

When an emergency situation cuts off normal methods of communication, a small group of Villagers is prepared to keep the lines open.

Members of The Villages Amateur Radio Club either are licensed radio operators or are working on getting licensed. A subgroup within the club, its emergency communications team, works with emergency response organizations to prepare for possible emergency scenarios.

"It's predicated on the idea that during an emergency, you're going to lose communication through normal channels," said Sam Miceli,

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a member of The Villages Amateur Radio Club and the Division 7 supervisor for The Villages Community Emergency Response Team, commonly referred to as CERT.

CERT is a local volunteer organization that trains Villagers in how to best respond in emergency situations. Being a member of both CERT and The Villages Amateur Radio Club, Miceli came up with idea of the two organizations pooling their resources to be even better prepared for emergency situations.

"If there's a chance we could encounter an emergency, we need to be prepared for it," said Miceli, of the Village of Duval.

CERT and The Villages Amateur Radio Club are just two pieces of the greater emergency communications puzzle.

One of the most important organizations in emergency communications is the Amateur Radio Emergency Service, or ARES, an offshoot of the American Radio Relay League. ARES is a national organization with a complex hierarchy that divides the organization into sections down to a county scale.

ARES is made up of volunteers who are available to deploy in emergency situations, as well as in nonemergency situations where radio communication is needed. For example, ARES volunteers participated in setting up public safety communications during Hurricane Idalia. They also set up a radio communications network to ensure proper operation during the



Submitted photo

George Briggs and Karen Erickson, both members of The Villages Amateur Radio Club, operate ham radios for an international competition.

Lake Panasoffkee Christmas parade.

ARES, CERT and The Villages Amateur Radio Club all work symbiotically. Mark Newby, the ARES Emergency Coordinator for Sumter County, said that in an emergency situation during which a multitude of volunteers is required, ARES can call on its pool of volunteers, which includes radio operators from both CERT and The Villages Amateur Radio Club, especially if the emergency situation is in or near The Villages.

Newby said ARES would provide all the supplies and procedures necessary for volunteers to effectively operate with the group. How the organizations team up is determined by the situation itself.

"It depends on the scope of the emergency," Newby said.

Newby said that ARES does not self-deploy. It only acts if called upon by another organization, which could be CERT asking for additional volunteers or even the government requesting help with emergency communications.

Miceli said that in more small-scale situations, The Villages Amateur Radio Club's emergency communications team could stand on its own.

In the event of an emergency situation that directly affected The Villages, all the different groups devoted to emergency communication would immediately enact the plans they already have set in place in order to work with the local government to ensure the safety of citizens as best as they can.

"We would have people working in the field all over The Villages," Miceli said.

George Briggs, president of The Villages Amateur Radio Club, said the club welcomes new members and is actively seeking volunteers for the emergency communications team.

The club meets from 6 to 8:30 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month at Eisenhower Recreation. For information, email Michael Hissam at mjhissam@sbcglobal.net.