

Volunteer patrol aids police on Halloween night

BY KIM FRLAN
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Members of the Panoramaland Amateur Radio Club patrolled the streets of Colville on Halloween night as extra sets of eyes for the Colville Police Department. They dubbed themselves the Hoot Owl Patrol.

"We didn't expect any trouble, but you never know," said volunteer patrolman Bill Wadkins.

"The whole goal of the thing was to build cooperation between the club and the police," said Police Captain Bob Meshishnek. "The Police Department is extremely grateful to the club, and children and parents should be, too. It made it a safer evening for everyone."

The idea for the Hoot Owl Patrol came up at one of the amateur radio club's regular meetings. It was mentioned that the club had helped the police department in that way in the past.

Club member Karl Miller contacted the police chief, and through a series of emails, they worked out the details for the Halloween night volunteer effort.

Twelve amateur radio operators drove around town from 4:30 to 8:30 p.m. with their radio sets in six cars. A command post was set up in a Sheriff's Department vehicle at Yep Kanum Park. Club member Bruce Fortune and one city policeman manned the post. If volunteers saw any suspicious activity, they radioed the command post. Then the policeman sent the information out to the squad cars, and vice versa.

"It went very well," Fortune said. "Plenty of information was transferred. It was good practice for us."

Many of the 72 members of the amateur radio club are also on standby to relay information in the event of a natural disaster.

Fortunately, nothing disastrous occurred in Colville on Halloween.

"There were a lot of people out in certain areas," Wadkins said. "If anything was out of order, the police department got somebody on it immediately."

"We had several minor incidents," Captain Meshishnek explained. "Reckless drivers - pumpkin throwers. Nothing out of order for Halloween."

Fortune emphasized that the effort wasn't a response to a felt need for extra patrols.

"It was an effort to make sure all the little harmless trick or treaters were not lost from their parents," Fortune said.

Both the police department and the club are interested in keeping the Hoot Owl Patrol functioning on future Halloween nights.

"We're picking up where we left off," Wadkins said.