

Disaster team works hard for something they dread

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Of the Press-Gazette

If Green Bay is lucky, the Delta Team will never go to work.

The Delta Team is the Red Cross network of volunteers trained and organized to provide relief services should the community ever experience a natural or manmade disaster. The Delta Team is made up of people like Bob and Mary Lou Treleven, who give their time and energy to prepare for a catastrophe they hope will never come.

Recently, the Red Cross gave the Trelevens an award for the work they had done on behalf of the Delta Team. The citation reads, "In grateful appreciation for outstanding community service." Since Red Cross volunteers cannot accept payment for their work, it's the only way the organization could express its gratitude.

Bob and Mary Lou have each led and helped to organize one of the component teams in the Red Cross disaster relief network. Bob is active in both the local Green Bay ham radio clubs, the Mike and Key Club and the Northeastern Wisconsin VHF Society Ltd. With his friends in both clubs, Bob has organized an alternative communications system which would be at the disposal of the Red Cross in the event of a catastrophe.

Mary Lou has put together a team of professional nurses who would be available to lend their expertise in a crisis. These women would gather at the Red Cross following a calamity and provide first aid service in addition to the emergency services available at the city's three hospitals.

Bob and his friends in the ham network already have a little bit of experience in disaster response work. When a tornado struck Oconto Falls, local ham operators established contact with a ham in Pound and verified early reports that a twister had indeed touched down.

A survey team in four-wheel vehicles then drove to Oconto Falls to assess the damage first hand. They found 12 homes had been damaged and verified that all the victims had found alternative shelter.

Bob's network has also proven useful in easing the concern of Green Bay residents when relatives in distant areas were caught in a disaster area.

When sections of Texas experienced major damage from tornadoes several years ago, local hams went into action.

Green Bay residents with friends and relatives in the afflicted area made inquiries at the Red Cross which passed them on to the local ham operators.

The hams then contacted their counterparts in the disaster area and checked on the safety of the people on their list. Of the nearly 20 people on the list, only one was directly affected by the storm and that person was safe.

Channel 5 TV has placed two repeater antennas on its transmitting tower and those frequencies are available in the event of a disaster. The repeater antennas are used to receive and strengthen a local signal and then relay it.

In a moment of crisis, one of Bob's chief responsibilities would be to determine who would have access to that frequency and assign priorities for its use.

One of biggest problems in putting together a disaster team is keeping people organized and ready for a test that may never come.

"Sometimes," Bob said, "people say there's nothing better than a disaster to get things going good."

Maintaining a state of readiness is especially tough for Mary Lou and her nurses. Bob and the other ham operators have regular contact through their club, but not many people are into recreational nursing.

Because she doesn't have much con-

tact with her team members, Mary Lou tries to impart the critical information in one short meeting. Since they are already trained professionals, the nurses simply need to know where they should report in a crisis.

Recruitment also is a problem.

Nurses who work at hospitals and retirement homes are expected to report to work should an emergency occur. Consequently, Mary Lou has had to build her pool from nurses who are retired, unemployed or work in businesses. She also realizes a disaster can produce conflicting loyalties.

"In a time of trouble I think all people must attend to their own families first," Mary Lou said. "But speaking for nurses, I just think that should there be a disaster I'd find them coming out of places I didn't even expect."

With Point Beach relatively close, a nuclear mishap is one of the primary potential disasters the local Red Cross is considering. In a Three Mile Island situation, standard communications systems would be flooded and the ham network could play an important role in organizing an evacuation.

Because disasters often don't advertise themselves in advance, the system is designed with a chain of command if the leaders are unavailable. Bob works in Appleton in electrical research and may away at a critical moment. Mary Lou, however, works in Green Bay at the Webster Clinic.

Neither of the Trelevens set out to make public service a major activity. Bob drifted into it from his ham activities about five years ago. With Bob's encouragement, Mary Lou attended an organizational meeting for a disaster nurses team. Unfortunately, it "bombed out" and Mary Lou wrote a letter expressing her disappointment. And that's how Mary Lou became head of the Red Cross disaster nursing unit.



Bob and Mary Lou Treleven of Green Bay look over ham radio equipment which Bob uses to relay information during a disaster.

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