

Ham radio operators in touch with world in good times and in bad

By **DIANA SHOLLEY, STAFF WRITER**

Many 17-year-olds choose cyberspace as their worldwide link of choice, but not Peter De Kluyver. The Claremont resident is on a different frequency - literally.

Peter is an amateur radio operator or ham as they're known. He is one of the youngest members of the Tri-County Amateur Radio Association.

Each month he gathers at La Verne's Brackett Airport with other Tri-County hams from Riverside, Los Angeles and San Bernardino and talks about this early form of global communication.

"I was pretty much a loner before I joined," Peter said. "Amateur radio has brought me out of my shell. I've made friends all around the world."

Becoming a ham operator comes with some responsibility and a license is required. Because of the responsibility, getting licensed is somewhat intense. But, it's a close group with experienced members helping the novices.

Charles Phillips, club president, explained that there are four levels of licenses, each granting greater access and radio privileges. Each level takes about four weeks of training followed by a comprehensive test.

"Tri-County is said to be the oldest ham club west of the Mississippi," Phillips said. "We're not sure exactly when it started, but we have documents dating back to 1925."

Phillips was first introduced to amateur radios when he was about 12. His neighbor had one and the youngster was intrigued that the fellow could talk to people from all over the world.

"After college I got into the hobby myself," he said. "I've enjoyed it ever since. I have friends all over the world."

Besides making friendly connections, having fun and sharing a common interest Tri-County members play an important volunteer role, community and emergency.

"We are enlisted by law enforcement and community groups to help with communication for special events," Phillips said.

Along parade routes, 10K trails or bike lanes, where ever they're needed, hams are happy to volunteer their time and equipment to keep things running smoothly.

They have also contributed invaluable assistance in emergency situations such as Sept. 11 and both the San Francisco and Northridge earthquakes.

"When cell phones, land lines and electricity goes out, hams still work," Phillips said. "When the power goes out all we need is a battery and an antenna. The Northridge quake knocked out every cell phone station. In some places hams were the only way to communicate."

Bob Embrey knew first-hand what Phillips said was true. He was working in Long Beach at Loral, which would eventually become Lockheed, when the Northridge quake hit.

"This fellow in the office didn't show up," said Embrey, a retired logistics engineer. One of the girls said, "Bob, can you get ahold of your radio friends and see if you can get ahold of him?" "

Embrey quickly got in contact with a ham in Northridge. The missing man lived in a rural area and when the ham operator arrived he found the man and his family stranded in their home with no way to communicate.

"That guy was so happy to see help," Embrey said. "They were running out of everything. Their computer went through the wall. That human contact made all the difference in the world."

Sue Banman, wife of incoming president Alvin Banman, was the director of Emergency Services for the Pomona Red Cross for 25 years. She always breathed a little easier because of the quick reacting service of the hams.

"It's so comforting knowing you'll have communication when you need it," Banman said. "These are a great group of people. They help each other and they help the community."

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