

The Truth is Out There

People have asked me why I am running for Section Manager (SM) for the Maryland/District of Columbia (MDC) section against the incumbent, Tom Abernethy, W3TOM. Some have claimed that I am rocking the boat since the incumbent is doing such a “fine” job. Well, the reason is that the boat is sinking, and the MDC Section deserves better. Everyone knows quite well how he talks the talk, but let’s briefly look at the real facts on the issues that have been raised during this campaign.

Section Manager Responsibilities. As stated on the ARRL Website: “The SM's main job is to recruit, through several subordinate program managers or coordinators, League volunteers to staff eight crucial program areas: emergency communications, message traffic, volunteer monitoring, RFI problem-solving, support of affiliated clubs, government liaison, encouragement of technical activities, and dissemination of on-the-air bulletins.” MDC Section members are hard pressed today to identify these managers and programs. While it is important to visit the large number of clubs in our Section, it is far more important to first have a well established ARRL management structure and to actively support and recognize the accomplishments of these dedicated members instead of one’s self. For example, Tony Young, WA3YLO, is a fine man who, I believe, is still the ARRL club coordinator. Has anyone heard any mention of Tony’s many accomplishments? Why hasn’t Bob Bruninga, WB4APR, been recognized as an extremely valuable Section resource as a technical representative both from a member educational perspective and as a key emergency communication resource? After all, he only invented the Automatic Position Reporting System (APRS), and continues to make significant improvements and enhancements to the system. Who is the Official Observer Coordinator? Based on current Section information, the MDC Section still doesn’t have one. As far as anyone can tell, the program is non-existent in our Section. The SM’s responsibility is to manage the stated responsibilities of the Section and oversee its operation, not seek personal face time.

ARRL Official Observer (OO) Program: As all Amateurs know, the FCC has taken a keen interest in the enforcement of Part 97. They have recognized that one of the major strengths of the Amateur Radio Service has been its ability to be self-policing, a fact pointed out by Riley Hollingsworth

recently. The OO program is a key component of this responsibility. Having been an OO myself for several years now, it is obvious that our local program and support of OO's is nonexistent and lacking leadership. Living in as large and diverse area as we do, we have ever-growing problems with noise and interference everywhere. We need and deserve to be better organized and not just be told at re-election time that we are doing a good job. During the past two years I have never received a single communications from the Section Manager regarding Section OO activity. The SM must be honestly involved in all phases of ARRL operations not providing endless empty promises and "glad handing" at Hamfests.

Emergency Communications: As events of the past couple of years have clearly demonstrated, Amateur Radio Emergency Communication (EMCOMM) capabilities have become a critical resource to our communities. The SM has the responsibility to ensure that this responsibility is met aggressively and effectively, something seriously lacking in the MDC Section.

Actual experience in emergency communications is essential to understand the many facets involved with its planning and execution. You cannot just stay in your own yard and get the job done. Amateur Radio needs to be out there in the public's eye. After Hurricane Andrew passed through Miami Florida, I packed up and drove there the next day to work with the recovery efforts. I took everything I required to provide support and relief to help the victims. I spent seven days there in a house that the eye of the storm passed over. I lived in the disaster until the supplies ran out and I was physically exhausted. Amateur Radio played a critical part of the recovery effort there and continues today to be a truly crucial element of our Homeland Security program.

For the past couple of years the ARRL has been aggressively developing and presenting a standardized emergency communications program for the Amateur community, the Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Course (ARECC), as part of the ARRL Certification and Continuing Education (C-CE) Program. As the ARRL's official ARES certification course, nearly every ARRL Section has embraced this program except MDC. Our Section has elected to subordinate this program to a "revitalized" local program. Have you seen anywhere in Section news or correspondence the encouragement to get this training? How can any responsible ARRL SM consciously ignore the Homeland Security recognized ARES training and

certification program sponsored by the very organization he is suppose to represent?

W3TOM has stated that he is committed to meeting the EMCOMM responsibilities of the Section and points to several emergency events over the past two years as examples of that commitment. It is worthwhile to look at the actual results of this “commitment.”

W3TOM points to the local Amateur response to the Pentagon Recovery Effort on 9/11/2001 as an example of his EMCOMM leadership. The fact is that he was not in the area during our Pentagon support operations. I was at the Pentagon. The call to my home from the MDC Section Emergency Coordinator (SEC) was received at 11 PM on September 11th who was asking for help locating volunteers to help the Virginia Section, who was responsible for the Pentagon response. I immediately volunteered and got five more of our experienced EMCOMM men to go with me in the span of 15 minutes. All of us served for three days in the middle of that terrorist driven disaster area. We did not meet reporters or grandstand. We moved food, socks, bandages, water bottles, fixed generators, served meals, listened to relief workers who needed a break also and gave them some comfort while passing traffic for the Salvation Army. We smelled the building burn, saw the flames and destruction, listened to the non-stop noise of recovery vehicles for hours. I was rushed out of the center of the Pentagon when a bomb threat was received; only to return after the bomb-sniffing dogs cleared the area. I helped a marine who passed out from heat exhaustion. I passed out food and drink to men wearing flak jackets and carrying AR15's that were loaded and ready during that time of shock and confusion. We did it all because we knew it had to be done. When it comes time to plan or discuss emergency and disaster preparedness, I know from personal experience because I was there, not sitting in an office developing theory. We have no awards or plaques or any recognition at all, even from the MDC Section Manager, from that experience, only dirty hands, vivid memories, and valuable experience.

The tornado that struck La Plata nearly a year ago has been held up as an example of EMCOMM leadership. As the former Charles County EC/RO, Tom was responsible for the establishment of a viable ARES/RACES operation for Charles County. While ARES/RACES members frequently provided the County with the support it required during his extended absences, no more critical was the need than during the Category IV tornado

that ripped through the center of the County. Despite glowing claims to the contrary, unfortunately the County ARES/RACES program failed to provide a basic level of support. Due to the acute shortage of local ARES/RACES members, individuals from Prince George's County had to staff the only shelter opened following the storm for the duration. Staged ARES/RACES teams from adjoining areas were left waiting in remote staging areas and finally gave up and left. While the leadership was busy seeking out publicity and involving themselves in unrelated activities, the basic communication needs were left lacking. This was clearly evident from "The Maryland Independent" article describing the findings from the formal study commissioned to analyze the response to the tornado wherein they identified communication as the most critical shortfall.

The La Plata tornado demonstrated even more of Tom's commitment to effective EMCOMM in the Section. The Southern Maryland APRS (SMDAPRS) group was formed as an ARRL local organization over a year ago. This group has established a complete network of APRS stations and digis that cover the southern portion of Maryland extremely well and continues to expand, resulting in an infrastructure that would support emergency operations in that area. During the Category IV tornado that devastated La Plata, Maryland, one of the APRS weather reporting stations was critical in the weather measurements that the National Weather Service used in monitoring storm data, right up to the point the station was destroyed in the storm. Although the NWS recognized the contributions of all the southern Maryland APRS weather stations, the Section Manager refused to recognize the contributions and capabilities of this network. Has the SMDAPRS and its network been recognized and incorporated into the ARES/RACES plan for Southern Maryland, NO. While W3TOM talks about interoperability and effective utilization of Section resources, he actively ignores the efforts of dozens of active amateurs in his own back yard, who have demonstrated a proven capability that is needed in times of emergency.

Tom has indicated that "As Section Manager, Tom is now reviewing and renewing Memoranda of Understanding with the local branches of the American Red Cross and other organizations to reflect current conditions. As Section Manager he is committed to working within prescribed League guidelines with our served agencies." The demonstration of that commitment can be clearly exemplified by the EMCOMM support provided to Charles County over the past two years. As the President of the Charles

County Amateur Radio Club whose members also constitute the Charles County ARES/RACES Team, and as the Charles County EC/RO until assuming the SM role, he was responsible for providing support to the local emergency service organizations. For at least the past two years the local Charles County Chapter of the American Red Cross (ARC) looked to the Charles County Amateur Radio Club and the Charles County ARES/RACES team to support their emergency response communication needs and to better prepare the chapter for times of emergency. After two years of false promises, unreturned messages and phone calls, and lack of attention and commitment, the local ARC Chapter gave up on the ARES/RACES group, the radio club, and on Tom as a leader. The local ARC Chapter alternatively contacted the Southern Maryland Amateur Radio Club (SMARC) and requested their support. In the span of just a few short months, SMARC has set up a radio room, found towers and equipment, and got the ARC running, far exceeding the Chapter's expectations, true to the Amateur tradition. When invited last month to attend the signing of the Red Cross Memorandum of Understanding with SMARC, and the subsequent VIP ribbon cutting ceremony at the new Red Cross Chapter, Tom was conspicuously absent. Obviously a commitment in words only.

Where do we go from here? So we should re-elect an individual who believes he can single-handedly run the entire Section without the help of the Field organization the ARRL wisely has structured? I think not and I am sure that neither do you. I know that I am not an army of one and strongly believe in the power of teamwork. There are too many really good and talented people in this Section who contribute day in and day out who are being ignored while their leadership doesn't hesitate to take credit for the work they do. I can promise you that if I am elected, you will see the names of the Field Organization appointees far more often than mine and above all, you will know who they are and what they are doing for the Section. The time for being a "grandstander" is over, there is too much that needs to be done in our Section to waste time and effort on the ego games that are currently being played.

Why should I be given the job as Section Manager? I have been and am currently involved in many facets of Amateur Radio. I have been an active ham radio instructor for over 20 years, an Official Observer, Volunteer Examiner, multiple repeater trustee, and held various club officer positions. I have shared my teaching methods in three articles published in the

Proceedings and ARRL publications. I have had an OP Ed piece in QST and wrote the feature QST article “Fessenden Lost and Found.”

I think that Paul Segal said it best in his code he wrote so many years ago. “The Amateur is balanced ... Radio is his hobby. He never allows it to interfere with any duties he owes to his home, his job, his school, or his community.” I have missed club meetings to volunteer as a court official for the Teen Court program in southern Maryland. Likewise, I have missed some hamfests to do community work with the Waldorf Jaycees or to move band equipment for my son’s school marching band. I am sure that I will miss something that a Section Manager should do and I make no false promises that I won’t. I will, however, have in-place a fully capable Field Organization that can still get the job done and not let you down. This is a great hobby and provides a very important service to the country, but we must not lose sight of what we do and why we are doing it.

I have the breath and depth of experience that is needed to coordinate the efforts of the MDC Field Organization, listen to real problems from members and non-members, and to move this Section forward, not backwards. I do not go to hamfest and club meetings just to have fun as a guest speaker or for a free meal. I want to get the real work done and let the field organization really be a field organization and not a SM support group. Ham radio is a two-way interaction and not the one-way street we have now. I do promise this, that if elected, I will improve every area that the Section Manager has influence over and when my time comes to leave, MDC will be in far better shape than I found it.