

Grant Money Signals New Radio Equipment

By PAUL CATALA The Sun

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When the first signals were transmitted in 1980, the operations center contained the latest technology of that era for amateur radio operators to help residents in the event of an emergency.

Over time, much of that equipment had become obsolete or outdated, and until this year, was still being used by The Sun City Center Amateur Radio Club.

However, the transmissions have become clearer, as the radio club upgraded its equipment with a \$12,000 grant from the **Community Foundation of Greater Sun City Center**.

Founded Feb. 6, 1980 by 19 Sun City Center residents, the radio club has become an essential part of emergency operations in the area, helping coordinate activities with emergency medical services, law enforcement and government authorities in the event of an emergency.

From the operations center in the old Sun City Center Old Town Hall, 945 Cherry Hills Drive, some of the club's approximately 90 Ham radio members and operators with the club maintain transmissions.

For most of the past 28 years, that has been done on original equipment -- some more than 20 years old -- and much of had to regularly be shipped out of state for regular repair or maintenance.

But no longer will Ham radio members have to deal with dropped signals, garbled messages or out-dated technology. Instead, the operations center now has about \$50,000 in some of the best equipment available to amateur operators.

After testing a repeater, a combination of a radio receiver and a radio transmitter that receives a weak or low-level signal and retransmits it at a higher level or higher power, radio club member Dave Schierenbeck checked some of the new devices.

Schierenbeck, who has lived in Sun City Center for seven years and has been a member of the radio club for that long, said all club members are licensed Ham radio operators. He said

it was important for them to have new equipment to be able to reach people in times of an emergency.

One of the most important pieces bought through the grant was a \$1,500 repeater and a \$2,800 high-frequency Icom transceiver - a device that has both a transmitter and a receiver, combined to share common circuitry.

"They operate independently and we use both during an emergency," said Schierenbeck, who retired from Bell Systems as a facilities manager. "They operate on different bands and independently."

During emergencies, radio amateurs assist first responder groups by enabling emergency services, which use different frequencies to interface with each other. Rescue squads can then contact security patrols, the Community Emergency Response Team and can coordinate with community association maintenance.

All of the club's equipment can be run battery in case of power failure.

Sitting with radio club members Larry Brown, Bob Goldberg and Jim Vavrina during a recent operations day, Schierenbeck tested other new equipment: two, \$1,000, digital VHF-UHF radios, allowing operators to go into radio connections using computers instead of voice. All members go by call names when they transmit.

"In an emergency, you can type in sensitive materials. It gives us another option for emergency communications," said Schierenbeck, who goes by "N8PF."

Goldberg, said one of the most important purchases made were four emergency communications kits. Each kit, contained in a strapped, waterproof cases, are complete with triple-band, portable, two-way radio transceiver, two-meter antennas, high-capacity battery packs, cigarette lighter cords, fuses, speakers and microphone and other emergency communications supplies.

A retired maintenance director with the Miami-Dade school system, Goldberg - "WA4M" -- said each kit cost about \$1,000, but they're invaluable during a crisis.

"They have everything you need to communicate with in these kits, with back-up power systems, which makes them real important," said Goldberg, a member of the radio club for three years.

To keep abreast of changes in communications, keep their skills up and learn how to operate the new equipment, Sun City Amateur Radio Club members meet weekly via a week VHF signal on radios at their homes. That way, members can check to make sure signals are being received and ready for use during an emergency.

After going over club updates, Brown, known as "W3LWB," said the new purchases have

made keeping the area more secure during an emergency possible.

In addition to the Sun City Center Amateur Radio Club, the area is also monitored by the Kings Point Amateur Radio Club, located adjacent to Sun City Center and some members are active in both.

For information, call (813) 642-2071 or see www.sccarc.info.