

RAG Winlink

By TOM TCIMPIDIS

The CYC Radio Amateurs Group (RAG – call sign K6CYC) runs and supports a Winlink PMBO (Participating Mail Box Operator) system. This is located in the blue-awninged RAG Room, just across the parking lot from the Clubhouse and adjacent to the dockmaster's building. The RAG Room has existed since 1984 and the Winlink system has been in operation since 2003. It is the only active Winlink station on the West Coast between San Diego and Washington state. The CYC RAG also provides radio communications necessary for the conduct of races and other



activities held by the Club. The entire Winlink radio system is under remote control. This allows the Sysop (System Operator) to control and view the system from anywhere in the world. This is done via the Internet, as if he were sitting at the operating console in the RAG Room.

So what is Winlink? It is a method of providing two-way e-mail communications via amateur radio. It uses high frequency radio bands over both short (as little as a few miles) and long (over many thousands of miles) distances. This system is used for both emergency communications, and for routine communications with boats at sea and other mobile users. During Katrina, amateur radio and radio operators provided e-mail communication through Winlink. Since regular e-mail was unavailable, Winlink offered the only viable means of e-mail between agencies in the affected area and the outside world. Winlink and amateur radio received a number of federal commendations for the work done and the services provided during Katrina, and has been declared the communication system of last resort by the feds.

During the recent fires in San Diego, amateur radio and Winlink again provided a crucial role in the exchange of emergency e-mail and communications. These e-mails were communications from people within the area to others both within and out of the area, and to and from people around the world inquiring about the status of family and friends.

The RAG also actively participates in the Los Angeles ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Service) and the Los Angeles DCS (Disaster Communications Service). At the November

meeting of ARES, I presented a brief report that showed dramatically the role that the CYC Winlink station played during the recent fire emergency. For the duration of this emergency, the CYC Winlink station removed all time and transmission mode limits to facilitate any and all emergency communications. During the nearly three-week period of the worst of the emergency, the CYC Winlink station handled 3622 messages and 1156 users. The total amount of time used for this was 4654 minutes. This is approximately five times our normal volume for such a period.

In 2007, we accomplished a number of updates and improvements to the RAG radio equipment and room that improved performance, reliability and the comfort and aesthetics for the RAG operation and its members. The picture shows the operating position of the RAG radio room as of the end of November. In 2008, we hope to expand the RAG and Winlink operation to full EmComm (Emergency Communications) status. This will entail installing a power source to run the station in case of extended power outages during emergencies. We are looking into making this an environmentally friendly "green" radio room by using solar panels and AGM batteries to power the entire station. The batteries have already been donated to us. We'll also be adding backup radio, data and communications equipment in case of an equipment failure. Making the radio room into more of an amateur radio club for the RAG members, and attracting new members to the RAG, is also a priority for 2008.

RAG looks forward to continuing to improve the services we offer both to our CYC members and the public. We welcome any hams or prospective hams who would like to be involved with the RAG activities and/or amateur radio in general. We will have quarterly meetings in 2008 and all are welcome to attend. Also, please feel free to contact me at any time (tom@tgt.org) with any questions, comments or suggestions. We plan to host a number of open-house events this year. If you are at the Club and see our neon "open" sign is lighted, please feel free to stop by and see our setup for yourselves. ♦

RAG Protocol Session for Race Committee Members FEBRUARY 2

By S/C BILL WATKINS

There will be a ham radio protocol session on Saturday, February 2, at 10:30 a.m. in the Epicurean Room for members working on race committees, as well as for members who want to use their radios while coastal cruising. Members should bring with them their hand-held radios. We will be also talk about general ham radio protocol when transmitting on ham frequencies, as well as repeaters that are available to licensed operators who want to use their radios while going to Catalina or on a coastal cruise. ♦