

MTV ARES 2020 Newsletter

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December 31, 2020

Our Mountain View hams continue to train and practice our emergency communication skills so that we will be ready to serve the city in a time of need. In 2020 we invested over 4000 hours in city and county trainings and exercises despite the restrictions posed by pandemic guidelines. We increased the number of packet-trained members and added two new people to our type IV credentialed operators.



The year began with our annual antenna party which was well-attended by our local members and guests from neighboring cities. We tested antennas and radios and saw examples of go kits and other emergency radio equipment. It also was a chance to meet each other and share experiences with emergency communication in our cities.

In



February we tested packet equipment at city fire stations and identified needs for equipment there. Rick, Phil and Paul staffed the radio room at 1000 Villa for the drill. Little did any of us realize at this time that this would be the last time for many months that we would be able to use this room for drills or anything else, due to restrictions for the pandemic.

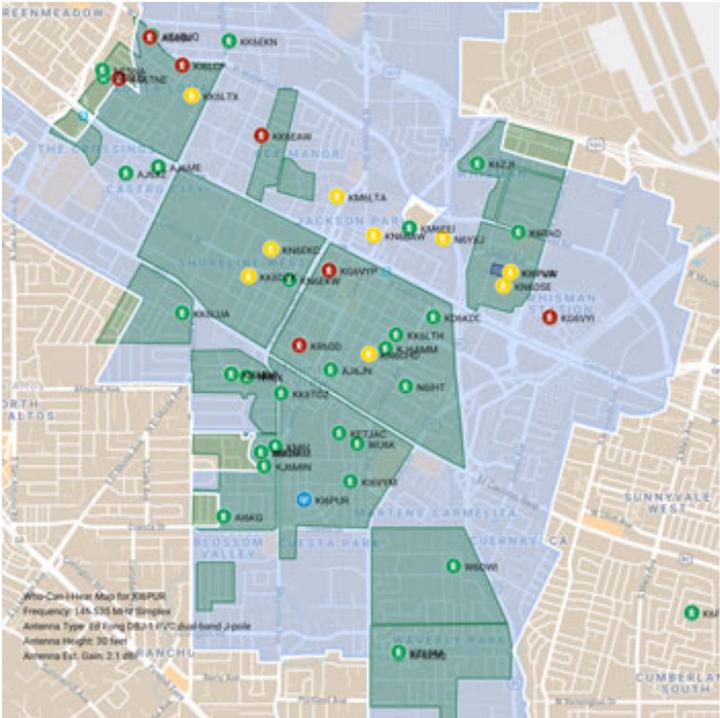
With the loss of the Radio Room we had to find ways to handle communications from our homes, following “shelter-in-place” guidelines. Our May drill “Expect the Unexpected” was performed that way. It required more operators and outside equipment than normal, but did give us a way to see how well we could operate under these conditions and handle unexpected events (earthquake, loss of repeater, loss of power, etc.)



Jeff working from home.

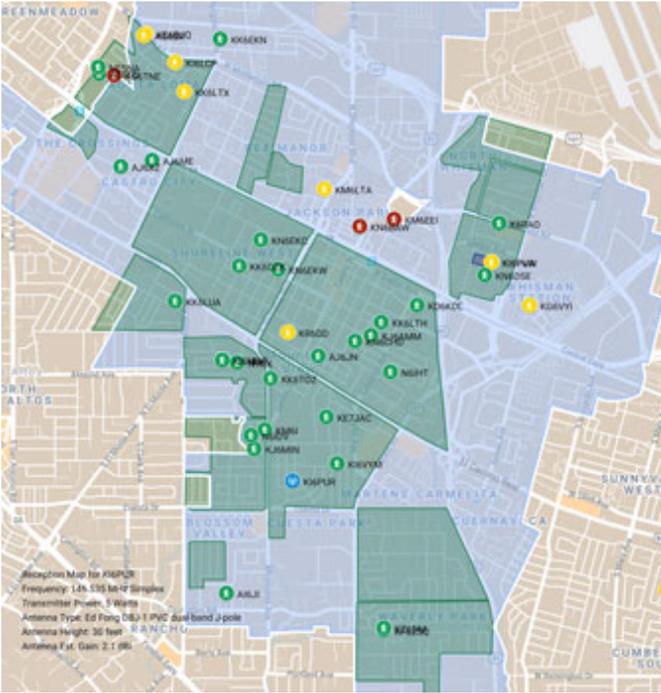


After some trial and error we worked out a method using a remote scribe and relay system so our members could test their personal equipment and practice net control skills from home. During April and May's Monday night check-ins our members recorded how well we could hear each other and we mapped the results.



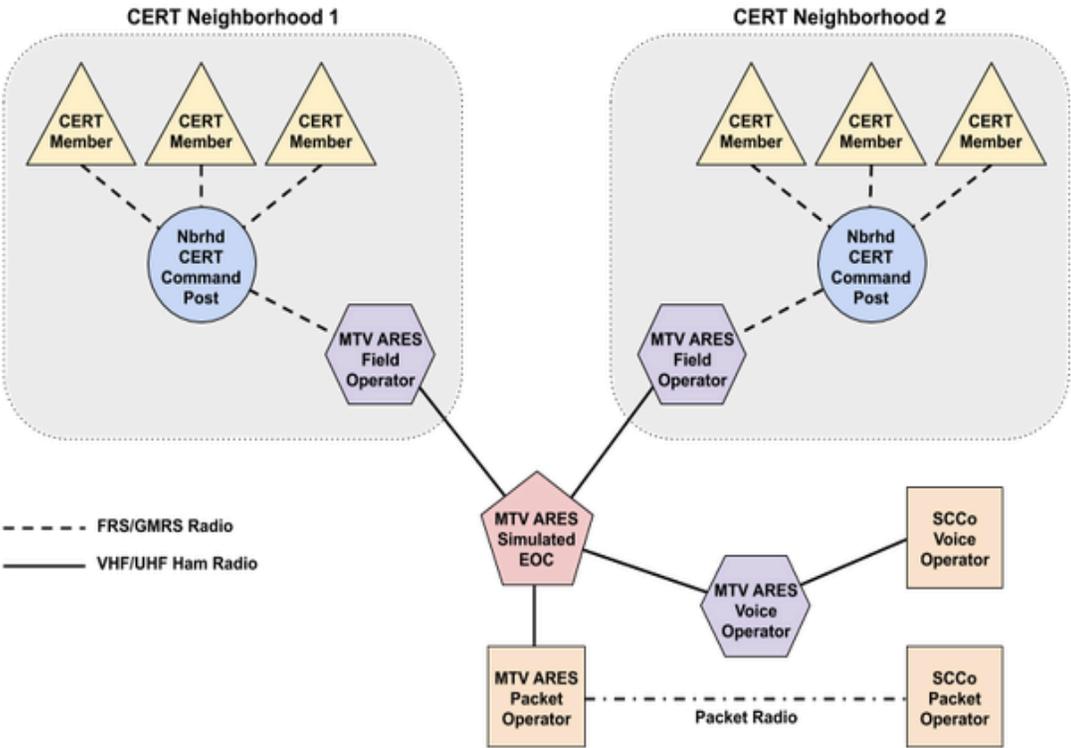
Rick's Reception Map.

We made two maps for every participant – one showing who they could hear and one showing who could hear them. This helps us know who could best serve from their home as Net Control in an emergency. Special thanks to Micky and Forrest for this work!



Rick's Transmission Map.

In August we created a drill to test ways to communicate from our homes in CERT neighborhoods to a simulated EOC. We used a combination of FRS and ham radios and had ham operators living near a CERT Command Post transmitting CERT messages. While it was workable, we found it required more resources (people and equipment) and was less effective than operating in person at the 1000 Villa radio room and CERT command posts. We had to resort to internet or phone for some operations that would have been handled by talking to fellow staffers if in the radio room.

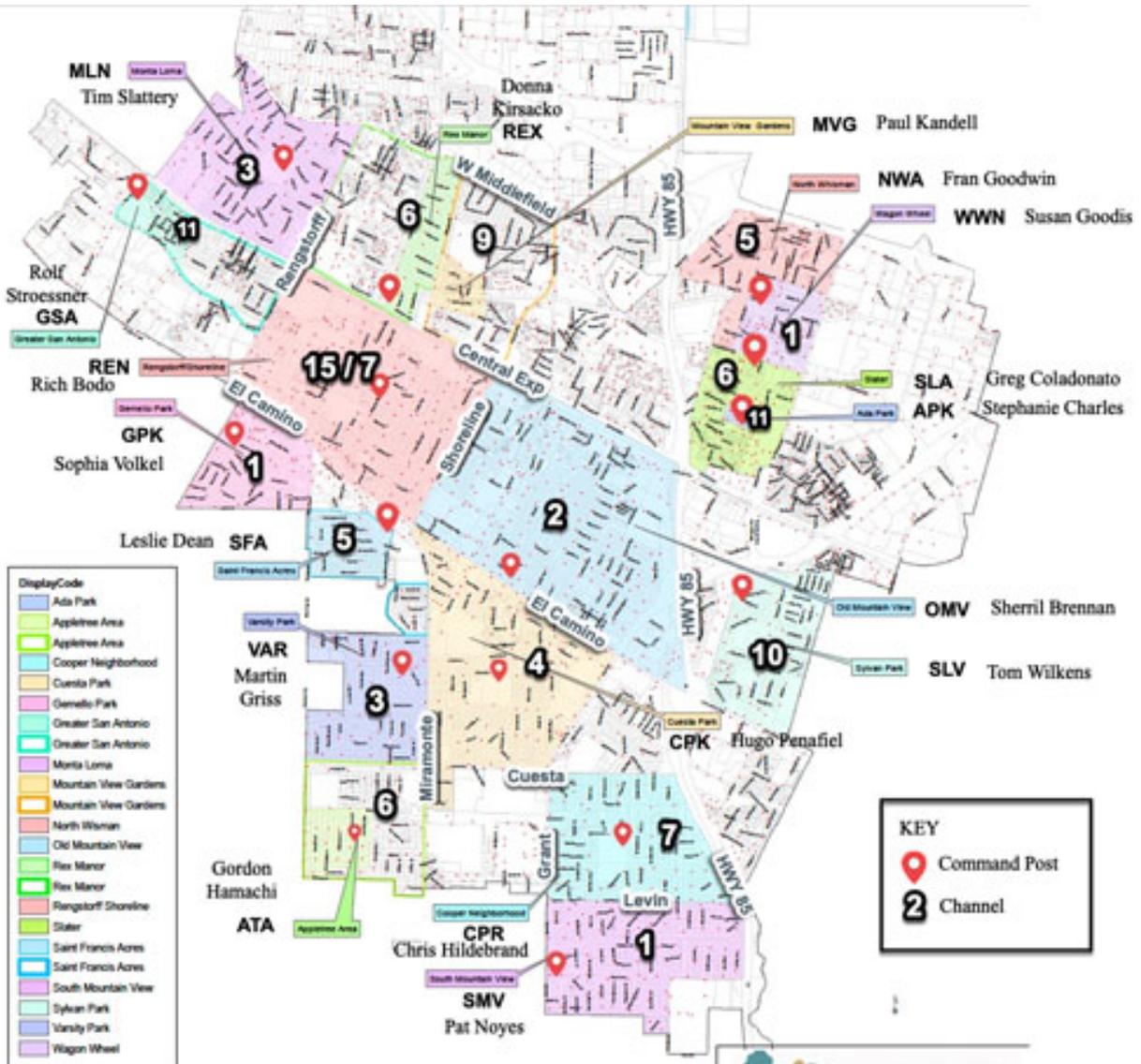


Throughout the year we have assisted CERT neighborhoods with their communications needs. This included advice on radio equipment to purchase and assistance with setting up equipment



Donna, Monica and Rick install a discone antenna at the Gemello Park CERT neighborhood Command Post in February.

We assisted CERTs in developing a new communication plan using only FRS/GMRS channels from 1 to 14, since they were experiencing interference on higher channels. We experimented with adjusting antenna heights so that CERTs sharing the same channel wouldn't interfere with each other.



In October some of our members participated in a simulated Public Service Event held by the county. It was called the Masked Pumpkin Festival Parade and was held at a county park with mask and social distancing requirements. Our members trained as check point monitors and shadows during half of the event and acted as parade staff or members of the public during the other half.



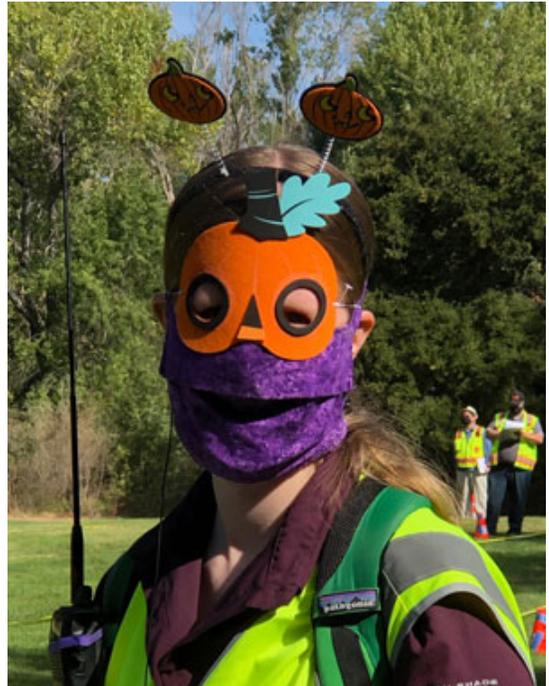
Leslie was Field Operations Manager.

Harry (on right) reports that the first float is passing his checkpoint.





Jeff and Forrest act as parade staff and fix the broken float.



Jeff and Kelly take the prize for the best mask! (Can you tell which is which?)

We were fortunate to receive grant funding this year from Kiwanis of Mountain View and the Neighborhood CERT Grant Program from the city. We purchased equipment for a mobile Command Post and a mobile packet kit for Fire Station 5.



Forrest shows the 10 by 10 foot canopy. We also purchased tables, chairs, lamps and sandbags for it.

We bought a computer and some radio equipment to complete a packet kit for the command post. We also purchased a backup power supply and solar panel so we will be able to operate off the grid.



The packet kit for the Command Post – Windows 10 computer, radio, TNC, power supply, and rigrunner.

The red thing at the right is a foldable cart for hauling equipment. The mobile packet kit for fire station 5 is in the container at the bottom of the picture.



We work closely with neighborhood CERTs, assisting with communication needs especially. The umbrella group for the CERTs – Association of Mountain View Neighborhood CERTs recently welcomed us into their organization. This will allow us to work even more closely with CERTs, and also to participate in grant applications, since they are a 501c3 organization.

WHAT NEXT?

Looking forward, we'll be testing our new equipment and refining plans for remote operations. When Covid restrictions loosen we hope to set up outdoors and work with CERTs city-wide to refine our plans for emergency communications. We appreciate the efforts of all our hams to continue trainings with the county and check in regularly on local nets.