After Action Report by Leslie Grimm
Trailblazer 2022

The event was held on Sunday morning, Sept. 24, 2022 at the Microsoft Campus on La Avenida. The race courses were on Steven's Creek Trail and in Shoreline Park. Start/finish was at the campus. There was a 10K run, 5K run, and a 3 mile walk.

REACT and Mountain View ARES handled radio communications. There were 10 hams: two at net control, one Bike Sweep for the 10K run, and 7 others at various mile-markers, turn-arounds and water stops. Net Control was located on the campus on the soccer field (see maps). We were able to have people at all the most important sites: Water stops, Turn-arounds, and some Mile Markers. We communicated on the W6ASH repeater at 440.8, using HT's with high-gain antennas (not rubber ducks), except for Net Control, who had a mobile radio and 18 foot mast with a roll-up dual band antenna. Communications to event staff were by cell phone. Several of us were using our bicycles to reach our posts and to sweep courses.

How it went:
Our hams were assigned well, with the most critical posts given to the most skilled operators. For this event, the 5K/10K split + water stop 1 was the most demanding assignment. It was difficult because runners were switching races – a 5 K runner left prematurely and decided they would join the 10 K race, and there were returning 5 K and 10 K runners overlapping. Traffic was almost non-stop for Net Control (4 pages of 309 in a two-hour period), but the two operators there were experienced and did an excellent job.

Operators posted to Mile Markers found that there were no flaggers there, and assumed the role of flagger as well as communicating bib numbers etc. There was no flagger for the 5K run turn-around, so the operator there became a flagger, and also did a sweep at the end. The 10K bike sweep also did his best to determine who were the last runners on the 5 K race, and passed that information on to the water stop / 1mile-marker operator. It all worked because people were flexible and experienced.

The operator at the 3 mile walk turn-around communicated with flaggers by texting, as well as communicating with net control by radio. That went well.

We had one operator who was new to radio communications in the field, but she was assigned to a water stop near another experienced operator and did well, despite a brief problem with her radio. When she had the problem with the radio she was able to communicate by cell phone with Net Control until she could get her radio working again.

Communicating with event staff was problematic. We had a list of cell phone numbers but it wasn't clear to us whom to call, even though their roles were listed along with the phone numbers.

For Next Time

Bikes:

Having operators on bikes was very helpful. They could meet at Net Control well before the race start and receive a briefing of any last-minute changes and then bike to their posts. A new operator could bike with another operator to find their posts, which were near each other. Any operator who finished their assignment (last runner/walker passed by) could easily bike to another location to help out. All operators could assemble at the end for a debrief. Bikes should only be "recommended", however, since not everyone can do it, and there are some parking areas near the mile markers that operators could drive to.

Cell Phone backup numbers:

These could be listed on the 211 as well as the assignments spreadsheet, so Net Control has quick access. Each operator should have cell phone numbers of Net Control.

Communicating with Event Staff

Some form of radio communication would be preferable, rather than only cell phones. Options:

1) An Organizer who is a ham listening on our frequency
2) one of our Hams assigned as Shadow to an Organizer
3) having an FRS/GMRS radio at our Net control on the frequency used by the organizers.

(This was the case when Aaron was the leader.)

Equipment

We need to specify that we need a 6-foot table or two 3-foot tables. We were given a 3-foot table and there wasn't room for the radios and big battery and paperwork. We took a table from the nearby campus outdoor dining area and got help from staff to drag it to our tent, so we were fine, but next time we should be more specific about table size.

Priority of locations

If there are no flaggers at the mile markers or at nearby trail turns we need to be clear on where we should go. Is it more important to be at the mile marker to report the first bib or to be at the turn so that runners can be guided? That may differ depending on how clear the turn is.

Mile Marker locations

If there are no flags (the tall feather-shape ones used in the past) then we need to know how to identify the mile markers. For this race, there was a cone beside the trail and a sign painted on the trail itself. You wouldn't see it if you weren't told about it. Operators need to know what to look for. Note that at one such mile marker the cone was covering most of the writing on the trail.

Parking at site

This worked well – we were allowed to park in the parking garage, a short walk from the event area. Net control could park at the end of La Avenida, near the soccer field where the NC tent was.