

Ham radios ready for team to use in emergencies

Amateur radio operators who work at McLeod Regional Medical Center are making sure that communication at McLeod can continue, no matter what emergency might happen.

Following the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Towers, Security and Communications Director **John Altman** began to think about the need for another mode of communication if the telephones and regular walkie-talkie radios were not working.

He talked with Pastoral Services Director **John Schumacher**, another "ham" radio enthusiast. Earlier this year, they decided to use the Problem Solving Process to implement a ham radio system at McLeod. Other McLeod staff helping with the project are **Mike Duff** and **Wendell Parnell** of Information Systems, **Ken Williams** and **Lee Hyman** of Security, **John Zelenka** of Sports Medicine, and **Wayne Howell**, a volunteer chaplain. They were assisted by members of the Florence Amateur Radio Club.

Radio equipment and a portable cart were bought, and antennas were installed near Emergency Services. The plan called for the equipment to be mobile so that it could be moved to another location if Emergency Services were involved in the emergency situation and the radio operators needed to set up in another location, **Duff** explained.

Although McLeod owns the equipment, it can be operated by only licensed ham operators, **Schumacher** said. Team members with less experience are continuing to take training courses so that they can increase what they are allowed to do.

This fall, the group tested the readiness of McLeod when they participated



*Ham radio operators (L to R) **Ken Williams** of Security, **Mike Duff** of Information Systems, and **John Schumacher** of Pastoral Services were part of the team who joined together to develop a new system for communicating during emergency situations.*

in an emergency disaster drill planned by the US Army at Fort Jackson. The scenario was that an "incident" had occurred in Columbia, causing all of the hospitals there to be at capacity. McLeod and Saint Eugene were chosen to take "casualties."

Ken Williams used the ham radio equipment to handle communication from the Army. He radioed information to **John Altman** on the the security radios. **Altman** conveyed that information to a Switchboard operator who sent out the "Code Green" alert. Communication for the rest of the exercise was conducted through the radios.

Army representatives were pleased with the success of the drill, the radio operators say. They plan to apply for a grant from the US Department of Homeland Security to buy additional

equipment. By hooking up a computer to the radios, they can track ambulances, people, and weather bulletins.

In addition, they are hoping to work with other hospitals in the state to develop a network of ham radio systems that can be used to contact one another in such emergency situations as hurricanes and tornadoes.

For anyone who would like to learn about becoming a ham radio operator, the Florence Amateur Radio Club will begin an eight-week training course on Tuesday, January 13 at Poynor Adult Education Center. The cost is \$35, plus \$22 for the coursebook. Register by calling Poynor at 664-8152. For more information, go to the club's website, www.w4ulh.org.