

***PUBLISHED IN THE FEBRUARY 2009 SEA RANCH BULLETIN***  
***The Amateur Radio Auxiliary***

**An interview with**  
**Tom Ingersoll, Dennis Kelleher and Bob Sears**  
**By Rob Elder**  
**December 8, 2008**

**Q. Let's talk about The Sea Ranch Amateur Radio Auxiliary. How many members are there and what do you do?**

TOM: We're a group of amateur radio operators who are ready to assist with emergency communications. We like operating radios; it's a hobby. But it's also a skill we can use to help the community.

DENNIS: Our general purpose is to provide emergency communications for The Sea Ranch and surrounding  
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areas—Point Arena, Anchor Bay, Gualala, Stewart's Point, Timber Cove, Bodega Bay. We have approximately 56 members right now. Twenty of those are licensed amateur radio operators.

BOB: We typically pronounce the name of our organization as "T-S-RA-RA," The Sea Ranch Amateur Radio Auxiliary. Gene Rosholt was the founder. He arrived here in 1985, and shortly thereafter witnessed a car drive off Highway 1. While helping the driver, it occurred to him that if he had had a radio with repeaters nearby he could have immediately obtained help. Gene was already interested in amateur radio but hadn't yet completed his radio exam. Not long after this incident, Gene took his radio exam, earned his license, and formed TSRARA. He called the organization an "auxiliary" because he wasn't forming an amateur radio club. He was forming a vehicle through which he would solicit money to obtain local emergency communications equipment.

TOM: As Bob just mentioned, the idea was to fund ham radio equipment – all that would be required to set up a station for emergency communications. There weren't enough ham radio operators available to fund this effort, so Gene started an auxiliary with members who wanted to support this effort at The Sea Ranch but weren't necessarily amateur radio operators themselves.

**Q. How do the efforts of TSRARA dovetail with the Association's Emergency Management Department activities?**

DENNIS: Well, Bob Sears who's been here for 17 years wrote the first emergency communication plan for The Sea Ranch and was the first volunteer emergency program coordinator. Because of the generosity and marvelous contributions of people like Bob Sears and Gene Rosholt, we have a repeater on the Moonraker tower for cell phone communication that enables us in time

of emergency to talk with people in Santa Rosa and elsewhere through amateur radio links. When we work with the Emergency Management Director, Louise DeWilder, we can provide backup communication services at her request.

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If our repeater and cell phone towers became inoperable during a major disaster, we can actually back up Cal Fire or other emergency services and transmit communications all the way to Sacramento. We can talk to a ham elsewhere who would call back to Santa Rosa and say, "Look, this is the situation on The Sea Ranch." We can also do this for any other clients in the neighborhood such as Redwood Coast Medical Services (RCMS) and Coast Life Support. We might, for example, have one of our hams go to KTDE, our local radio station, and provide them with updates. KTDE could then broadcast those updates on the FM band to get that vital information out to all Sea Ranchers. Our Auxiliary serves to assist with the emergency and disaster communication services of these agencies.

### **Q. What is a repeater?**

TOM: A repeater, simply described, is a radio located on a ridge-top tower. Its function is to receive a transmission from a low-power, 2-meter handheld radio

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### **WHAT ARE THOSE CALL BOXES FOR?**

When your phone is not working and you have an emergency, you can go to a CALL BOX on Highway One for help.

The phones are there to assist you; do not hesitate to use them when you need help. The operator will see that you get the appropriate assistance, whether you need emergency help or just a tow.

*Lin Plescia, Director of Security*

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The other thing that we did a lot of in those days was updating KTDE with road reports and other information – a large operation for all of us.

The next thing that comes to my mind is a propane truck that overturned near Iverson Road. In that incident we were able to help firefighters with telephone calls made from street level near the overturned truck.

It should be noted that telephone calls can be made through the repeaters we've been talking about.

In 1996, during the Yardarm Fire at the south end of The Sea Ranch when power lines blew down and started a fire, we staffed the Cal Fire communications van. It was an interesting operation because we hardly knew how to operate it, but we managed to get it going. Interestingly though, the cell phone supplied in the van

couldn't make calls through the Verizon tower. You know how you have to have a Verizon telephone to do that? Well, they didn't. This made it necessary to use our repeaters for some of the messages.

Some time ago, when a car crashed into the telephone distribution box at the corner of Highway 1 and Halcyon, we had our amateur operators there for over 24 hours handling emergency calls and answering questions because telephones were out over this entire area.

We're possibly best known for the "Emergency 911 Assistance" signs posted along Highway 1 when phone service is out. When house telephones and Highway 1 call box phones are out of service, we station ourselves near the Highway 1 call boxes. If only house telephones are out, we put out signs to tell people they should use the call box phones. When someone reports an emergency to us, we relay the information to Cal Fire via radio, and they send the information to their dispatcher – about the same thing as calling 911.

DENNIS: The last time we activated "Emergency 911 Assistance" was on January 5, 2008 when we had the power outage for two or three days during a big storm. You might wonder how we know where to go and when. We all turn on our battery powered radios, and we have a net control – like an orchestra leader or a traffic cop – to say, "Okay, you do this and you do that." Whoever's first on the frequency takes that responsibility.

We have antenna drops at the Knipp– and re-transmit it at a higher power, thus greatly extending the range of the signal.

We also have link radios that link our repeater to other repeaters to extend our coverage even more. For example, I can transmit to our repeater with my 2-meter handheld, and my signal will be transmitted to repeaters in Point Reyes, Sonoma Mountain, Cloverdale, Ukiah, Laytonville, Garberville, and Scotia. We can also put out a signal all the way down to the Bay Area and beyond, often down into Monterey.

**Q. What are some of the things you've done in the past during emergencies?**

BOB: Most recently we participated in the Silver Sentinel Disaster Response Exercise which covered ten counties in California. We had amateur radio operators at each of the branch locations at The Sea Ranch, and we utilized our repeater to talk with each other. All messages going to KTDE were handled via an amateur radio person that we placed there. Dan Levin, Chief of The Sea Ranch Volunteer Fire Department, wants to count on amateur radio to be able to send messages into Santa Rosa in the event of his own possible communications problems. We demonstrated our ability by sending a message to the Office of Emergency Services in Santa Rosa during Silver Sentinel.

Before we go too much further, I want to point out that the work being done by Community Manager,

John Fox, Director of Emergency Management, Louise DeWilder, and Director of Security, Lin Plescia, and their respective staffs and volunteers has been absolutely outstanding. I think their energies and talents and ideas are well aimed. Lin, by the way is an active ham operator.

Our first major emergency was the Salt Point Fire that happened just after Thanksgiving Day in 1993. This fire really erupted – from a distance it looked like a huge atomic cloud. I actually saw it first from Anchor Bay. TSRARA assisted firefighters, Sheriff’s Deputies, Highway Patrol and other agencies by passing information from one to the other. In those days these agencies couldn’t easily talk to one another on their radios, so amateur radio often filled in these gaps.

## **The Amateur Radio Auxiliary–cont’d**

Stengel Barn, the north fire station, The Sea Ranch Association office, and soon the Sea Ranch Lodge.

**Q. Let’s say we had a disaster situation here, the phones were all out, and I needed to urgently contact someone out of the area to let them know my family is okay. Could you help me?**

DENNIS: That’s a great question. In the situation you’ve mentioned, I could do a welfare check call. I’d use our link system to contact Santa Rosa and talk to a ham there – we all know hams all over the place. I’d call and basically say, “I need to have a welfare check. I have So-and-So here, and would you please be kind enough to call this phone number and give them the following message.” These welfare checks are a public service and are frequently needed during major emergencies such as Hurricane Katrina or earthquakes and wild fires.

**Q. Is the Radio auxiliary supported by The Sea Ranch Association? Do part of our dues go to buy your equipment?**

BOB: No, it’s strictly funded through TSRARA donations and dues. Monthly Sea Ranch Association assessments do not provide any funding to TSRARA. Please consider becoming a member. We have three categories of memberships: annual dues are \$15 for individuals or \$25 for families, and there’s a life membership which is a one-time tax-deductible donation of \$100. The life membership contributions are taxdeductible as they go through the North Coast Institute which is a non-profit 501(c)3.

DENNIS: Your next question might be what do we need this money for? Well, we have lots of equipment to maintain. We just replaced a worn out repeater radio on the Moonraker tower to the tune of around \$1,200. We also have ongoing expenses for our telephone auto patch service. If someone is in a traffic accident where there’s no cell service, a licensed amateur radio operator can access a telephone line through our Sea Ranch repeater. It’s a service that we pay for and

costs about \$360 per year. Because it's an all volunteer effort, no one gets paid for their time. The expenditures are only to maintain the equipment.

**Q. We're sitting in a little room at the Knipp-Stengel Barn that's less than 20 x 20 feet square and kind of cold – but big enough to hold four of us and your radio and what looks like a generator. Does TSRARA own this stuff or does it all belong to you individually?**

DENNIS: The organization owns and funds the repeaters on The Sea Ranch including the repeater radio, the link radios, the auto patch, and the drop antennas that Bob mentioned. Some of the equipment is on loan from the County Department of Emergency Services.

TOM: The generator was purchased by The Sea Ranch Association. Lin Plescia was instrumental in getting funding for the "Emergency 911 Assistance" vinyl signs you see over here. Most hams have a 2-meter handheld radio similar to the one on the table. Many of us also have a 2-meter mobile radio in our car and high frequency equipment capable of reaching throughout California, the U.S., and around the world. All our personal radio equipment, which we make available for emergency communications, is funded by ourselves.

**Q. Let's say there's no emergency at the moment and you're just enjoying your hobby, sitting home with your radio. What do you do?**

TOM: Most of us scan the local ham band and emergency entity frequencies when we're sitting at home or in our cars. These are the ham bands where we might engage in a conversation or the emergency bands to pick up on an emergency where our help could possibly be needed.

If I want to have a friendly conversation with another ham, I pick up my radio and say, "This is KD6MUE listening." If someone is listening and wants to talk, we'll have a conversation.

DENNIS: There's a local amateur radio club in Anchor Bay that most people in TSRARA belong to. Every Tuesday night we all get on and test our equipment to make sure it's in working order. Depending on a person's interests, they might have a conversation in Morse code, or they might have it in voice. We enjoy determining "How's the band tonight?" Atmospheric conditions have a tremendous impact on long-range transmissions, not so much on short-range transmissions.

In a true emergency, if our short-range transmis-

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sions were destroyed – for example, if this building collapsed and the Moonraker antenna tower went down – we could communicate using our high frequency rigs with a long wire antenna set up temporarily in our backyards.

Another thing that hams do is called field day activities

where you set up a whole antenna system, bring your radio out, and set up a tent in preparation for a disaster. If you had an earthquake, tsunami or any kind of forest fire, we are able to bring our equipment and set it up temporarily to be able to transmit great distances to get help.

**Q. Do you talk in the spoken word or do you use Morse code?**

TOM: I use voice.

BOB: I use Morse code quite often.

DENNIS: Morse code is no longer required for people who want to be hams – that used to keep a lot of people out of the hobby because it sounded complicated.

However, Morse code has tremendous advantages over voice because you don't need as much transmitting power to send it, and it's easier to understand than voice transmissions when the band has lots of static noise on it.

**Q. What have we not talked about that we should?**

DENNIS: We'd like to expand our capabilities in the future. We have repeaters, but we don't have the capability to interface digitally with computers. Some Sea Ranch hams would like to do something called IRLP which stands for Internet Radio Linking Project where you download a protocol and transmit using the Internet all the way across the country on a two-meter radio. It marries the advantages of the Internet – computers and high-speed satellite transmission – with pocket radios. We look forward to some tremendous advantages there, and, hopefully, some day TSRARA will be able to add that capability to our service.

BOB: I'd like to encourage people to consider becoming a ham radio operator. It's relatively easy these days to get an entry-level license. Every now and then, Ken Reynoldson has a class in Gualala. Once you pass the

**JOIN TSRARA!**

Anyone interested in helping support the efforts of The Sea Ranch Radio Auxiliary to provide emergency communications can become a member.

Membership is not restricted to persons who are licensed amateur radio operators. We have three categories of memberships: a regular individual membership at \$15 annual dues, a supporting family membership at \$25 annual dues and a life membership which is a one-time taxdeductible donation of \$100. Please consider becoming a member.

For regular dues of \$15 or \$25, which are not taxdeductible, send your check payable to TSRARA, care of Dennis Kelleher, P.O. Box 896, Gualala, CA 95445.

For a \$100 one-time donation, which is taxdeductible, send your check payable to the North Coast Institute to the same address above.

Thank you for helping to support emergency communications in our coastal area.

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exam, you'll get your license, and then with about \$150 or less, you can get a two-meter handheld transmitter like we all have and you're off and going. I'd recommend that anyone interested should contact one of us or visit the local ham website at [www.abarc.net](http://www.abarc.net).

**Q. Thank you, gentlemen.**

For more information about The Sea Ranch Radio Auxiliary or becoming an amateur radio operator, contact:

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