Radio a star in emergencies

Ham operators seek grant for communication system

By **BONNIE DELANEY**
TOMS RIVER BUREAU

BERKELEY — In a perfect world, the demonstration Robert Murdock Sr. set up would have worked. He was attempting to show amateur radio operators how to use portable computers linked to their ham radio transceivers to send e-mail-type messages to and from the Internet or from station to station.

Using three laptop computers he set up in a classroom at the Ocean County Office of Emergency Management at Robert J. Miller Airpark, he attempted to demonstrate the benefits of such a system. However, glitches such as not trying it out at home using battery power occurred.
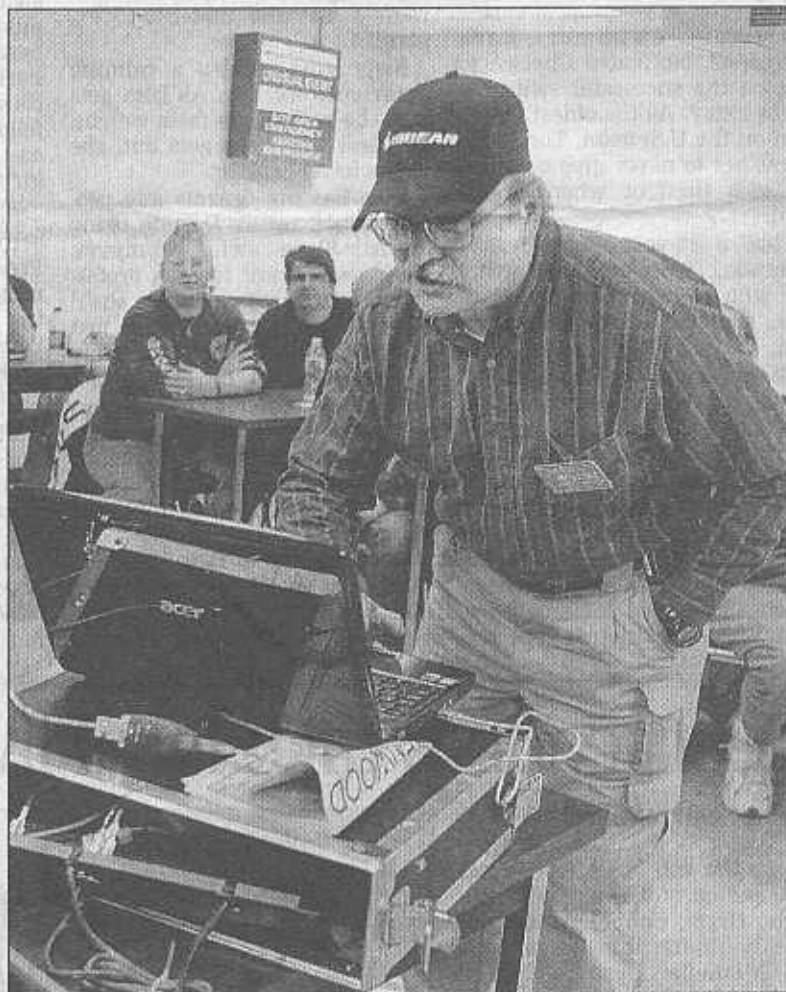
"This is exactly why we need to work the kinks out of it and practice before an emergency occurs, and we find out we're not prepared," said Murdock, president of and emergency coordinator for Ocean County Amateur Radio Emergency Service Inc., who is trying to secure grants of about $10,500 to construct a digital system known as Winlink 2000.

"The digital technology ... has been accepted and implemented by ARES teams around the United States and hams around the world. Ocean County ARES is in the testing phase of Winlink 2000 and plans to fully implement a VHF/UHF system in the near future," he said.
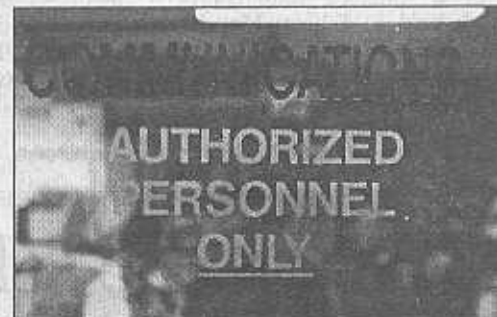
When other ARES groups tested the system they were able to pass 31 full-page messages in 32 minutes using Winlink 2000, Murdock said.

"It could take all day to pass the same number of messages through voice communications," said Murdock, who was able to get the system up and running after a few tries.

"Having the amateur radio people here supplements the county system," said Peter Genneken, community coordinator for the Ocean County Office of Emergency Management.

Robert Murdock Sr., president of and emergency coordinator for Ocean County Amateur Radio Emergency Service Inc., attempts to program a radio using a computer during a meeting at the Ocean County Office of Emergency Management at Robert J. Miller Airpark. (STAFF PHOTOS: ROBERT WARD)

In emergencies, people could man radios in this room at Robert J. Miller Airpark in Berkeley. During Hurricane Katrina, ham radio operators had the only mode of communication.
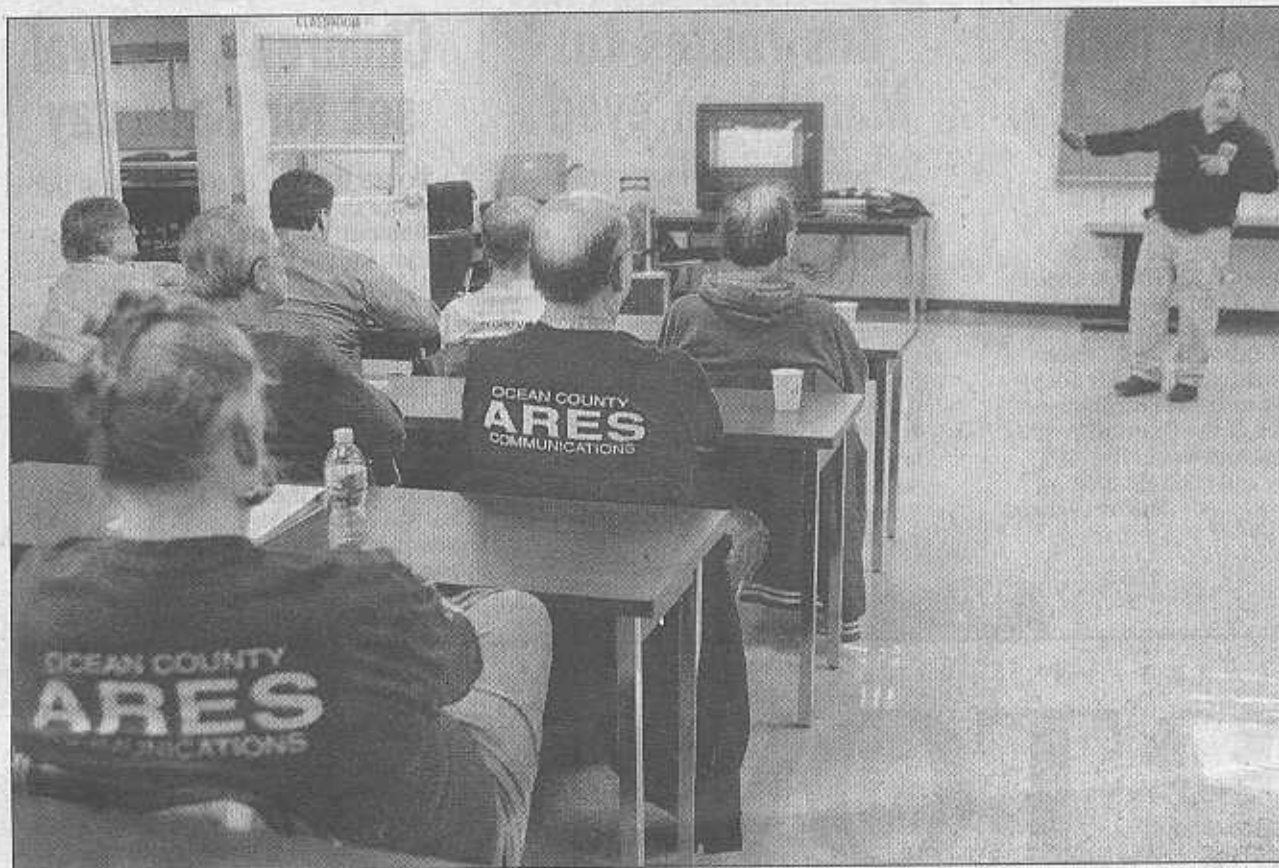

"If the county repeater goes out, I know one of these guys can hook up something right from their car and keep us on the air."

— Peter Genneken, community coordinator for the Ocean County Office of Emergency Management

AT A GLANCE

OCEAN COUNTY AMATEUR RADIO EMERGENCY SERVICE INC.

The nonprofit organization consists of licensed amateurs, also known as hams, who have voluntarily registered their qualifications and equipment for communications duty in the public service of Ocean County when a disaster strikes. Robert Murdock Sr. of Berkeley is president of the 50-plus-member Ocean County ARES, which meets at Robert J. Miller Airpark in Berkeley. For more information, e-mail Murdock at wx2nj@comcast.net or call (732) 269-6379.

The Ocean County Amateur Radio Emergency Service meets at the Ocean County Office of Emergency Management at Robert J. Miller Airpark. All ARES ham radio operators are Federal Emergency Management Administration-trained in the National Incident Management System. (STAFF PHOTO: ROBERT WARD)

Radio

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Murdock said he has also been working with area hospitals to program amateur radio equipment the hospitals received through Homeland Security grants.

On April 15, Neil J. Bryant, regional director for Safety Management at Community Medical Center in Toms River and Kimball Medical Center in Lakewood, was at the ARES meeting to take steps to become certified to use the radio equipment.

"During Hurricane Katrina, all the state-of-the-art technology didn't function, and the ham radio operators had the only mode of communication," said Bryant, adding that his hospitals have two-way radios, satellite phones and a 200-megahertz radio to aid in communications during an emergency.

"This will enhance what we have," he said. "We're looking forward to having a long-term relationship with ARES."

ARES holds weekly on-air training sessions for its members, some of whom are also trained weather spotters for the National Weather Service Skywarn program and the county's Radiological Emergency Response Preparedness program. All ARES ham radio operators are also Federal Emergency Management Administration-trained in the National Incident Management System.

ON THE WEB: Visit www.home.comcast.net /~wx2nj for more information about **Ocean County Amateur Radio Emergency Service Inc.**