

## New Amateur Radio Station Installed in Orinda's City Hall

By Andrea A. Firth



Gene Gottfried and Marty Heyman at the Amateur Radio station in City Hall  
Photo Andrea A. Firth

**T**hey were there after 9/11, after Katrina, and most recently after the devastating earthquake in China. Amateur radio operators—or hams—have served as auxiliary and primary communicators in disasters settings for the past 100 years. And if disaster strikes in Orinda, they will be there too. A new Amateur Radio station has been installed at City hall and was formally presented to the City of Orinda on June 3rd.

Envisioned before ground broke on the new City Hall, the station was financed through a grant from the Orinda Rotary

Club and installed through the combined efforts of the City of Orinda and Amateur Radio Operators of the Orinda Rotary Club and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

“Basically whenever disaster strikes, the hams come on the air,” says Gene Gottfried, who serves as the Volunteer Emergency Coordinator for Orinda. Gottfried’s interest in ham radios started a little over ten years ago when he innocently asked a member of the Fire Department how he would communicate with rescue operations from his home up on El Toyonal in the

event of a major fire or earthquake. The answer was a ham radio, so Gottfried put an antenna on his roof out of his wife’s line of sight and proceeded to get trained and certified with an FCC license.

“We become an organic network. We fill in and stitch together what is needed,” adds Marty Heyman, Orinda Rotary member, ham radio operator, and ostensibly Gene’s right hand in Orinda’s emergency coordination effort. When asked how often Marty communicates with his ham radio set up, he answers quickly, “Constantly.” Heyman runs a weekly citywide emergency drill each Wednesday evening where hams throughout Orinda and Moraga call in to an assigned radio frequency. Typically these amateur radio operators are part of community emergency response teams and neighborhood watch groups.

The new radio station in City Hall will provide reliable two-way radio communications in the event of an emergency when normal communication channels become overloaded or inoperable. There are an estimated 60 to 70 ham radio operators in Orinda and several hundred throughout Contra Costa County. Each week ham radio operator throughout the county, who have special training in emergency communications, conduct practice drills to ensure that they will be ready in the event of disaster.