

W4JOL finds his 'calling' supporting search and rescue team

By day, *Joel Barrett, W4JOL*, is a solutions architect — a senior-level networking engineer — for Cisco Systems. He works from his home office in Norcross.

But in his spare time, he's found his "calling" — using his ham-radio skills to work with Alpha Team K9 Search and Rescue (ATSAR) <http://www.atsar.org/>.

"It's the only thing I've found that completely takes me away from sitting in front of a computer or working on a piece of equipment all day long," Joel says.

After joining GARS, Joel soon joined Gwinnett ARES, found out about Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), and saw a connection between his day job — optimizing WiFi networks for major retailers — and supporting search-and-rescue operations in the field.

He eventually found his way to ATSAR, a K9 search-and-rescue team..

Joel isn't the only licensed ham with ATSAR — he says his title is "ground-pounder," which means he can support ground search operations — but he is one of the primary communication specialists

ATSAR typically uses analog modes, person-to-person for small search areas. But the group does have a mobile repeater, and each team member has repeater frequencies programmed into his or her handi-talkie. The group also has been experimenting with D-STAR and has acquired two Icom IC-92ADs. Joel's own go-kit rig is an Icom IC-2820.

Joel trains with ATSAR on the first and third Saturday of every month. He also attends the occasional special training session — like the one on poisonous snakes given a few weeks ago by a herpetologist who graduated from the University of Georgia.

"I really, really hate snakes because I was almost bitten by one. I wanted to get past that and learn more about snakes, maybe even feel a little more comfortable around them. It didn't help," Joel says with a laugh. "I'm still just as paranoid. But I'm much more knowledgeable now than I was before."

Joel learned his technical chops as an electronic warfare and anti-submarine warfare operator for the Navy. After some

time spent in the IT industry, he figured out how to parlay that knowledge of antennas and wireless technology into a full-time job. He joined Cisco Systems in 2000 and has been there ever since.

Still, Joel wanted to learn more about wireless, and he figured earning a ham-radio license would be a good way to do so. When the FCC dropped the code requirement in 2006, Joel took the plunge. He earned his Technician license in February 2007, and

upgraded to General two months later.

Joel serves as GARS net manager and schedules control operators for the Monday-night net, stepping in to control when the need arises which doesn't happen often. "We've got a great group of people who are committed to making sure that the net goes off without a hitch," he says. "We do a pretty good job."

Want to know more about Joel? His website is <http://www.brainslap.com/joel>. ■

Members of the Alpha Team K9 Search and Rescue (ATSAR) team spoke about their work at the April GARS meeting. Net manager Joel Barrett, W4JOL — who also works with ATSAR — invited the team to demonstrate its K9 capabilities.



Pictured above are ATSAR members Cheryl Knieriemien, KI4SWA, document unit leader; Paul Ruszczyk, KI4ADT, team treasurer; Barney, K9, search and rescue dog; Paula Chambers, KI4LGR, team president; Stuart Samples, KG4PFQ, training coordinator; and Susie Braswell, K9SPB Public Liaison.

Braswell, also a Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT) member, presented slides of her work with DMAT in Haiti following the January earthquake. "The room was very quiet during her presentation," said Sandy Jackson, KJ4DRO, program manager. "Seeing the pictures does take your breath away."

ATSAR members discussed the different types of K9s and their abilities, ATSAR and the challenges the team faces, typical search-and-rescue and communications equipment carried in the field, and some of ATSAR's callouts. GARS members had lots of questions, and conversations extended out into St. Marguerite's parking lot long after the meeting ended.

If you are interested in learning more about the ATSAR team or want to get involved, go to <http://www.atsar.org/>.