

TOM MACKIN

GOES TO THE END OF THE WORLD ON THE DISCOVERY CHANNEL

BY SCOTT ROARK

IF A NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST doesn't get us, global warming might. Or perhaps a stray comet. Regardless of the scenario, a post-apocalyptic world would certainly need engineers to recover.

And that is how Mechanical Engineering Professor Tom Mackin landed a role on the reality television show "The Colony" on the Discovery Channel.

A series in the spirit of "Survivor," it casts a group of people into an 80,000-square-foot Los Angeles warehouse without electricity, food or water after the hypothetical "end of modern civilization."

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"Engineers would probably be a hot commodity after the Apocalypse," he said with a smile. "Bottom line: You're going to need people that build things."

To audition for the series, which aired last summer, Mackin responded to a broadcast e-mail from the Discovery Channel. They were looking for a mechanical engineering professor. Mackin sent a brief bio. A Skype interview followed, then a meeting with a film crew member, and he was in.

The show features marauding "gangs" on the outside of the warehouse, trying to steal the group's limited resources. Emotions run high, conflicts abound and drama ensues.

Mackin was not in the warehouse with the others, though. Instead, he provided commentary and insight during multiple episodes of the show, explaining what the group needed to do to survive.

First order of business? According to Mackin, it's clean water.

"The group initially collected water from the Los Angeles River – not the cleanest source – and filtered it through sand," Mackin said. "Eventually, a more reliable system for water purification was developed."

In a real-life scenario, security would quickly follow water and food on the priority list. "You would then have to build weapons to protect yourself; that's the reality. Security would come before creating a reliable source of energy," explained Mackin.

He found the logic in the video crews' decision-making a bit less apparent.

"It was funny," he said. "They told me not to shave before the filming of the first episode, to look rugged. When I arrived on the set in Burbank, they took one look at my four-day-old stubble and promptly had me shave. Maybe it was the high-definition cameras," he said, laughing.

