

An Editorial

“Ham Radio Moments”

One of the things I've been “preaching” recently at club and hamfest talks is the need to share with each other our excitement about whatever it is we're doing in ham radio at the moment. The licensing numbers show a troubling trend toward non-renewals when licenses expire.

Some of this, of course, is due to Silent Keys whose family members are not aware that they should return the deceased amateur's license for cancellation, but the numbers of non-renewals recently have been far in excess of the numbers of Silent Keys. Fortunately, the number of new people coming into the hobby each month is holding steady or growing, so our numbers continue to grow overall and ham radio continues its half-century long tradition of “successfully dying.”* But it's obvious from these numbers that we have a growing problem with people dropping out of ham radio after either 10, 20, who knows, maybe 30 years or longer. Whatever it was that excited them about ham radio when they first got licensed somehow has gotten lost and they don't even retain enough interest to renew their licenses once a decade. What can we do? How can we reverse this trend? After all, these are people whose names and addresses are listed in the FCC database. We know who they are and how to find them. How can we bring them back or, better yet, keep them from dropping out in the first place?

There's a variety of answers to that question, all of them correct, but one answer lies in the hands of every active ham and every club made up of active hams—*share the excitement!* If you're enjoying amateur radio right now, then you've found some aspect of the hobby that gets you excited, that makes it worthwhile for you to flip on the power switch on your rig. Maybe it's DXing, maybe it's contesting, maybe it's one of the hot new digital modes on HF, maybe it's working meteor scatter on VHF with WSJT new computer software that's changing meteor scatter from a highly specialized mode into an everyday propagation mode on VHF, letting you work out to 1300 miles on 2 meters any time of day or night (what's that about 2 meters being a local-only band?). Maybe it's CW. Yes, CW—if you look at the results of the CQ World-Wide 160 Meter Contest in this issue, you'll see that for the second year in a row, more stations were worked on CW than on SSB; looks like this “antiquated” mode is “successfully dying” just like the rest of

ham radio. You know you're having a good time on the air, but it won't do the hobby any good if you keep that excitement to yourself.

I'd like to see every radio club include as part of its regular meeting agenda—and perhaps its newsletter in order to reach those who can't make the meetings—a few minutes for “Ham Radio Moments,” in which members are asked to share an interesting or exciting ham radio experience from the past month (or longer). It could be a special contact, qualifying for an award, a real interesting repeater QSO, anything *fun and exciting* in their ham radio lives. It doesn't have to be earth-shattering, just fun. If it's the kind of contact that makes you run up (or down) from the shack and tell your spouse, “Guess who I just worked?” That's the kind of contact you should be telling your fellow hams about as well. We're going to have a hard time spreading enthusiasm for what we enjoy about ham radio if we keep that excitement to ourselves, so don't limit it to club meetings. Tell people on the air, tell them in person, tell them in print.

A couple of examples (since I try to practice what I preach): Back in early October, I worked Gary, KG4VBL/AG, in Alabama on 20-meter PSK-31. It was his first PSK-31 QSO. Apparently, Gary used to be a ham—a WA9—but let his license lapse for whatever reason. Recently he not only came back, but brought both of his sons with him! Good job, Gary, and welcome back. I also met a semi-neighbor; K2RMC lives two towns south of me and works two towns north of me. Chances are we'll get together in person someday. On 15-meter SSB, I worked former CQ VHF Editor Steve Katz, WB2WIK, and some folks at the Alaska FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) Employees ARC club station, KL7FAA. Back on 20-meter PSK-31, I worked PJ4/W9NJY operating with just 8 watts from Bonaire! Finally, on 17-meter SSB, I had a fun QSO with VO1ONE, operating mobile from Signal Hill, Newfoundland, the easternmost point on the North American continent. Are any of these enough to make someone contemplating dropping out change his/her mind? Doubtful. What about the combination of all of these contacts, plus yours and those of your friends? Maybe. The key is that if we show people that we're excited about what we're doing in ham radio, then there's a good chance that they'll get the message that there's fun and exciting stuff out there to do, even if what they've been doing in

the hobby has lost its spark. In my view, anyone who says ham radio is boring hasn't seen very much of ham radio. But it's our responsibility as active hams to make sure we're not keeping our own fun and excitement a secret.

Changes

Over the next few months, we're going to be making some changes in what you see in CQ and in the people both on our pages and behind the scenes. To start with, we'd like to welcome Worked All Zones Award Manager Paul Blumhardt, K5RT, to the CQ staff as Director of New Business Development (WAZ Manager is a volunteer position). Paul brings us not only a world of ham radio experience but also 30 years experience in the commercial telecommunications field. While he'll be working mostly behind the scenes, don't be surprised to see Paul representing CQ at hamfests and conventions. Next, Edith Lennon, N2ZRW, who was Managing Editor of CQ VHF when it was a monthly, has rejoined our staff and is working on *Popular Communications* plus some of CQ's book projects.

This issue contains the final “Beginner's Corner” column by Peter O'Dell, WB2D. Peter has been writing the column since 1996, both here and in CQ VHF. Thank you, Peter, for six years of sharing your “ham radio moments” and helping encourage new hams to get on the air and get active. Peter will be succeeded by Wayne Yoshida, KH6WZ, as of the January issue. Helping new hams get their feet wet has been a CQ tradition since the magazine was founded in 1945, and CQ was the first amateur magazine to introduce a Novice

* For those of you who believe ham radio is dying, some numbers to consider: In 1980, there were just under 382,000 licensed hams in the United States. At the end of September 2002, there were just over 683,000, a 22-year growth rate of an astounding 79%! Looking at more recent numbers, there were just under 675,000 licensed hams in the US in March of 1999, so we're up nearly 10,000 in three and a half years—even with a growing problem of veteran hams not renewing their licenses. We've been averaging about 18,000 newly-licensed hams in each of the past five years. Add it up and we've got 90,000 new licensees in a five-year period. As I've said here in the past, ham radio has been successfully dying for the past half century and if current trends continue, we'll be successfully dying for next half century as well. Txn to AH0A for the number-crunching.

column when that entry-level license class was created back in 1951. Such ham radio luminaries as Herb Brier, W9EGQ; Don Stoner, W6TNS; and Bill Welsh, W6DDB, have carried the tradition of the CQ beginners' column through the decades. Today, as in 1951, CQ stands alone with its level of dedication to helping newcomers ... as the *only* US ham magazine with a monthly column dedicated to the new ham. We remember what it was like to be starting out, and we continue our half-century-old commitment to making the path easier. Maybe if more new hams were helped to get off to a good start, we wouldn't have the dropout problem we talked about at the beginning of this column.

Another forthcoming change ... since the worlds of ham radio (particularly digital ham radio), the internet and computers are becoming ever-more intertwined, we've decided to merge our "Digital Wireless" and "Computers and Internet" columns. As of the February issue, Don Rotolo, N2IRZ, will be here every two months to explore some facet of this intertwined world, from PSK-31 on HF to IRLP (the Internet Repeater Linking Project), WSJT (see above) and more. Former "Digital Wireless" Editor Steve Stroh, N8GNJ, will be devoting his time to his day

job and his responsibilities at TAPR, Tucson Amateur Packet Radio. Thanks, Steve, for your contributions to CQ.

Jeff Reinhardt, AA6JR, will be writing a quarterly mobilizing column starting with the February issue. This is in addition to his "Magic in the Sky" column, which we run periodically.

Two more personnel changes, both in our contest management area. Steve Merchant, K6AW, joins us as the new CQ World-Wide WPX Contest Director. Steve succeeds Steve Bolia, N8BJQ, who has decided to turn over the reins of our very popular WPX contest after 20 years at the helm. Steve, your contributions to not only the WPX contest, but to CQ as a whole are incalculable, and a simple "thank you" seems insufficient. We hope you will remain part of the CQ "family" for many years to come.

As you may have heard, Gene Zimmerman, W3ZZ, has been named VHF editor of QST magazine (Congratulations, Gene!). As a result, Gene has stepped down as Director of the CQ World-Wide VHF Contest to avoid any possibility of conflict. Gene has reinvigorated our VHF contest over the past two years, and we greatly appreciate his leadership. Gene's successor will be well-known VHF con-

tester and former ARRL Communications Manager John Lindholm, W1XX. Welcome aboard, John.

Finally, we're adding a new feature to our website, a photo gallery that's starting out with images from our own travels to hamfests and other events around the country. We'll also be creating space there for photos from readers who are involved with interesting activities for which a photo pretty much tells the whole story. Look for a link to the photo gallery from our home page at <<http://www.cq-amateur-radio.com>>.

Happy Holidays

It's that time once again when children's thoughts turn to new toys and hams try to make dreams of new radios appear in giftwrap. Commercialism aside, may we all enjoy the true spirit of this holiday season and look forward to a year in which, perhaps, we can work to solve the world's problems without blowing each other up. It's an area in which the rest of the world can learn quite a bit from the world's hams. Happy holidays to all and best wishes for a peaceful 2003.

73, Rich, W2VU
