

A Message from the President

My service as President of ARRL comes at an exciting time. The organization has made it through its centennial, and we have officially entered our Second Century with a bold new strategic plan and new CEO. My first year as ARRL President has been full of activity in the Amateur Radio world. The stories you'll read in this report detail what was achieved throughout the year.

Although this is the annual report of ARRL, describing the achievements of the organization, let's remember that we are a membership organization, and it's the ARRL members who make ARRL successful. The Amateur Radio operators who apply their knowledge, skills, and time out of sheer enjoyment of this wonderful hobby to help it grow make us successful. Throughout this report, you'll meet members of the ARRL Headquarters staff, the Board of Directors, the Field Organization, and also some of those ARRL members who made a difference in 2016. These are some of the movers and shakers of Amateur Radio. Their efforts keep ham radio moving forward, and keep it vibrant.

We all need to be thinking about that forward motion, and at no time is that more apparent than when talking to young people about Amateur Radio. Last year, I had the opportunity to speak to a high school group. I prepared my usual talk about some interesting ham radio stories over my 50 years as a ham, how we can talk all over the world, and I brought some QSL cards from rare places to show the group. I have given that talk many times, and it usually impresses people — but not this time. I was surprised to see flat, uninterested faces.

I realized that I had to change my approach to the presentation if I was going to keep the attention of these young people. After all, what could ham radio offer people who grew up in homes that had computers hooked up to the internet? Today's young people are used to riding down the interstate at 70 MPH as a passenger while watching high-definition videos on their iPhones. I quickly shifted the focus to discuss how ham radio has changed, the new technologies, the computerization of ham radio, and Raspberry Pi. I explained the newer digital modes, and talked about ham radio experimentation. The group lit up. I found the topics where ham radio touches that world — their world — and told them what was possible. They responded. That was a wake-up call for me.

What we're hearing from what I call the "new-generation ham," is that they don't view ham radio as being about talking around the world, contesting, or traditional aspects of our hobby. This next generation of ham radio operators view ham radio as a communications medium. Ham radio has value as the means to accomplish an act — the value is not in the act itself. So the question is, how do we extend the appeal of Amateur Radio to recruit people who view it as a means to an end?

Many hams are traditionalists. I count myself among them. Change generally doesn't come easy to us. But when I looked out at that group of young faces and saw their disinterest in traditional ham pursuits, I realized that I had to change. We have to change. It won't come easy, but it's essential that we get to work on it now.

The initiatives you will read about in this report show hams bringing people into Amateur Radio in new ways, and from points of entry that maybe you hadn't thought of: college clubs, citizen science, and Maker Faires. Hams just like you are making these things happen. Let these stories inspire you to reach out to someone who doesn't know about ham radio, and remember, it may not be what you yourself are interested in. How great we can be, for the next generation of hams, if we approach them offering the knowledge they truly want, rather than the knowledge we think they should want!

As you look back on 2016 in the pages of this report, think about ways you can build on what the ham radio community accomplished last year. It's going to take all of us to attract and retain a younger generation of Amateur Radio operators. Never underestimate the influence we have on others; the group of students that presented blank faces to my trusty presentation that had worked so well for many years sure had an influence on me.

73,

Rick Roderick, K5UR
President

