



Second Century

Rolling Out the Welcome Mat

A persistent concern we hear from new hams is that they attended a local radio club meeting and felt like an outsider. No one spoke to them. No one made an effort to let them introduce themselves. North Florida Section Manager Scott Roberts, KK4ECR, recently sent me a well-composed report of issues and ideas from town hall meetings he conducted. And there it was again: clubs that are perceived as closed communities (“talking to ourselves”), and newcomers, especially women and youth, feeling unwelcome. How will we solve this issue?

First of all, every club should look at how its meetings are conducted. Starting each meeting with a 1-hour business meeting is probably not the best way to inspire a new member. Consider how meetings could be more focused on the amateur radio activities the club is undertaking and sharing knowledge through live or virtual speakers — or recorded sessions from ARRL or YouTube that could be coordinated and hosted by one club member with discussion afterwards.

Second, what opportunities does the club offer for new visitors to make themselves known and get involved with the club? Of course, starting off with an open mic for visitors is an obvious first step, but what if that is supplemented by a recruitment or new member coordinator for the club? Ensure that not only does the visitor have the opportunity to get involved, but that there's a specific club member assigned to help the individual get licensed, get on the air, get involved with club activities like ARRL Field Day, and even get a station built or antenna in the air!

With this being the ARRL Year of the Club, now is a great time for your club to take a focused, intentional look at how you welcome new and inexperienced hams. Throughout the year, I encourage you to look for inspiring and informational content we have included in *QST*, *On the Air*, our newsletters, podcasts, and videos to help you bolster your club's activities for the benefit of your members.

ARRL is also urging clubs to be more accessible to their local communities and more inviting to new visitors by hosting a Ham Radio Open House! With April 18 being World Amateur Radio Day, ARRL created the Open House as a way for clubs to invite their local communities — and potentially new hams — to see what modern amateur radio is all about!

Pick any date in April to host your club's Ham Radio Open House, and start planning ways to attract those with curiosity or interest in amateur radio into your club station. The notion of hams sitting in Grandpa's base-

ment listening to tube radios is quickly dispelled when visitors see a modern transceiver and computer being used to work the world! Consider including a POTA activation or satellite operating demonstration.

Another tactic used successfully by clubs is for your Volunteer Examiners to conduct an exam session in the hour before a club meeting starts. You will attract those new hams and hams upgrading to take their tests and then hang around for recognition from the club with a round of applause! What a great welcoming moment for the new ham — and an inspiring moment to join your club and become a part of your community.

A large percentage of newcomers to amateur radio join because they want to get involved in emergency communications. What does your club do in terms of engaging and training members for emergency communications? Do you have a functioning Amateur Radio Emergency Service® group in your area? Is your club more involved with public service events than those related to emergencies? Hand-holding and guidance are required here because expectations of newcomers are high. It is highly effective for your club to have one person who is the single point of contact for these EmComm-inspired volunteers. Guiding them through the process is important to not losing them.

Your club may have its own successful methods for attracting and involving new hams and engaging visitors. I encourage your club to be radio active! Make sure there are great activities for newcomers. Be a connector! Get newcomers and visitors connected to club members who can help them. And if you're going to Dayton Hamvention, come and see me with your success stories!

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