



It Seems to Us

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A Final Word

“Next month this page will be in the hands of incoming Chief Executive Officer Tom Gallagher, NY2RF. Here the outgoing CEO poses two questions: What is Amateur Radio, and what will it be in the future?”

What is Amateur Radio? There are many places to look for an answer to this question. One can start with the international Radio Regulations, where there are definitions of the Amateur and Amateur-Satellite Services. In the United States, one can open the FCC regulations and find the same definitions along with dozens of pages of detailed do's and don'ts.

But for those of us who proudly call ourselves radio amateurs, the answer is much more personal and less boring. It is part of who we are, how we relate to one another, and what we have contributed or will contribute during our time on the planet. How we respond to the question may well change over time as we explore new branches of our ever-expanding avocation.

To be sure, we started out by earning a license — but that was only the beginning. An amateur license is like an admission ticket to a science museum; once inside, it's up to you which exhibits to see and how much time to spend absorbing each one. Studying for the license and doing nothing with it is like skipping the exhibits and heading straight to the gift shop.

Amateur Radio is the best hands-on, interactive telecommunications museum ever devised — a global facility without walls. Through its virtual turnstiles have passed generations of people who may look quite ordinary on the outside but whose inner motivations — curiosity about how radio works, often coupled with a desire to apply acquired technical knowledge to community service — set them apart. Each of us would describe Amateur Radio a bit differently, depending on our own interests and experiences up to the present and on what we hope to explore in the future.

In short, Amateur Radio is a global community that offers a framework for lifelong learning, public service, and personal achievement. How much we set out to accomplish within that framework is a personal decision that must be influenced by our other obligations. Done right, Amateur Radio will enrich your life in proportion to what you are able to put into it.

What will Amateur Radio be in the future?

The undersigned may be on his way out but that doesn't mean he is foolish enough to commit predictions to paper, particularly with regard to future technology. Still, there are things we know that are bound to influence what Amateur Radio will be for future generations.

According to the results of a survey conducted for the ARRL early last year, slightly more than half of the active radio amateurs in the United States are between the ages of 55 and 74. While many of us were licensed as teenagers and either stuck with it or resumed after a hiatus for career and family, about a quarter of those in this age bracket were first licensed within the last 5 years. Those aged 55 and above made up 45% of the newcomers.

This is not altogether surprising. Groups tend to attract new mem-

bers who are a lot like themselves. We welcome new licensees at any age; we benefit from the life experience they bring when they join us. Still, they will “age out,” along with the rest of us Baby Boomers. In other words, while new license figures may look encouraging, they do not necessarily ensure future growth.

Look at your own radio club. If it lacks a critical mass of younger members — if it's a bunch of older guys growing old together — chances are that it will disappear in a few years.

Fortunately, there are local clubs that don't fit this description. Some did, but the leadership recognized the problem and consciously set out to address it. Others are relatively new, founded because the established clubs in the area were like that and had no desire to change.

Healthy local clubs are essential. Clubs with a bright future are family-friendly. Meetings and other events don't have the flavor of a boys' night out; spouses and kids are welcome to full participation. These clubs offer a wide range of activities, including lots of continuing education and opportunities for everyone to participate up to the limits of busy family schedules. At the local level, they fulfill the ARRL's mission: to advance the art, science, and enjoyment of Amateur Radio.

And speaking of busy schedules, that's something else we know. Empty nesters and retirees may have time on their hands, but younger people do not. Studying, launching careers, and raising families leave little time for other pursuits. If we want their participation, we must adjust to this reality of 21st century life and accept that they may only be able to spare a couple of hours here and there.

So, getting back to the question: What will Amateur Radio be in the future? That depends on you.

As I prepare to turn the management of ARRL Headquarters over to Tom, NY2RF, I am very optimistic about that future because of you, the ARRL members whose loyal support and involvement have brought us to where we are today. I know you are ready to welcome a new generation who will write their own chapter in the continuing saga of Amateur Radio.

Prior generations of radio amateurs would be astounded to see what we can accomplish with the technological tools that are available to us and the frequency allocations we now enjoy. If we could gaze into the future I believe we would be equally astounded.

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