

Thanksgiving Turkey Ham

and Fee, Fi, Fo, ... Fee

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Some of us might be finding it difficult to be grateful at Thanksgiving this year, considering the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic and the social and political turmoil the country is experiencing right now, not to mention more and worse natural disasters, from the west coast wildfires to the extra-busy hurricane season in the east.

For those of us of a certain age, today's situation is reminiscent of the 1960s (except that the '60s had *much* better music!). The country survived the '60s, though, and I'm sure we'll get through this as well. And despite our problems, there is still plenty to be thankful for, especially us hams.

We can be thankful for ham radio itself. During the isolation of shutdowns and quarantines, amateur radio provided us with continued social contact, even if not in-person. We heard many reports in the spring and summer about weekly or monthly club nets going to a daily schedule in order to keep tabs on fellow members, especially those who are older, medically fragile, and / or living alone. But as we pointed out on this page a few months back, social distancing — or social DXing — is nothing new to hams. It's what we do, often at distances much greater than six feet (or, if you prefer, 2 meters!).

More time spent at home has frequently meant more time available for getting on the radio, something we're seeing across the board in our contest results. Every contest this year has had record participation (for an example, see the CQ WPX CW Contest results in this issue), and that shows no signs of slowing down.

Ham ingenuity has also come to the fore, as we figure out ways to keep doing what we do, from drive-in license exams and the growing popularity of completely online test sessions to online club meetings and remote multi-op contest operating (see K5RC's article in this issue for one example). There's even been at least one very successful online hamfest.

So, even if you can't have a big family gathering for turkey this year, you can still get together with a few hundred (or thousand) of your ham friends on the radio during the CQWW DX CW Contest. We've always used our radios to help our neighbors in times of need; now we're using them to help each other, and that is just one of many things for which we hams should be thankful, despite any other difficulties we may be facing.

Fee, Fi, Fo ... Fee

One thing for which we are *not* grateful is the FCC's proposal in late August to impose a \$50 fee on virtually all amateur license applications (including renewals). The proposal is part of a much larger package of fee changes pursuant to a law approved by Congress in 2018 which, according to the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (MD Docket 20-270), "fundamentally changed the structure of the Commission's application fees by moving from a schedule established by statute ... to one where the Commission has discretion to amend the schedule of application fees itself and set them based on the 'costs of the Commission to process applications.'"

The NPRM says the new law requires it to collect fees on amateur license applications, among others. The new fee schedule is supposed to be based on "direct labor costs" to process applications; however, the NPRM also notes that applications in the amateur and other personal radio services are "highly automated." In addition, the FCC no longer prints and mails physical licenses to hams, so there are no costs incurred there. It con-

siders a \$50 fee for processing applications to be "nominal." And in terms of businesses, that would be accurate. But we are individuals, many of whom are retirees on fixed incomes or, at the other end of the age scale, young people who we are trying to attract to amateur radio. For these hams, \$50 is a lot of money! And it may seriously impact a decision to apply for or renew an amateur license.

Since the law requires the FCC to impose a fee on amateur license applications, but gives it flexibility in setting those fees, we would encourage the Commission to make that fee as low as possible — say \$1 (or \$10 for a 10-year license term). This would keep the FCC in compliance with the law while not discouraging either young people or seniors from becoming or remaining active hams. We hope the ARRL will be as proactive in opposing excessive license fees as it has been in trying to hold onto our 3.3-GHz band.

Another Big Anniversary

As we wind down our 75th anniversary year, we make note in this issue of one other significant anniversary, the centennial of broadcast radio. It was in November of 1920 that KDKA in Pittsburgh, with engineer and ham Frank Conrad, 8XK, standing by, broadcast the presidential election results and started the radio broadcast industry. CQ cartoonist Jason Togyer, W3MCK, who lives near Pittsburgh, offers his visual salute to the event in a special full-page cartoon on page 27. And yes, we know others were broadcasting music and information earlier than this, but KDKA was the first to reach out to the general public (as opposed to other hams) with a regular schedule of broadcasts and, of course, commercials! Happy 100th to our brethren (and sistren?) in the broadcast world.

Random Notes

We have a new Emergency Communications Editor. Stan Broadway, N8BHL, will start writing the column as of next month's issue. Stan has decades of experience in emergency and public safety communications. He has worked as an emergency dispatcher and firefighter / EMT, organized amateur radio communications networks for the 2016 Republican National Convention (see Stan's article, "Three Events, Five Cities, One Week," in our October 2016 issue), and is currently ARRL Ohio Section Emergency Coordinator and co-manager of the amateur station at the Ohio Emergency Operating Center. We look forward to working with Stan and to his sharing his experience and expertise with CQ readers. We need a new Awards Editor. As noted last month, Jim Houser, WA8JIM, has stepped down to deal with family health issues. If you're interested, please contact me.

Finally, we wrote earlier this year about the need to make more and better use of our microwave bands or risk losing them to commercial interests. Well, it's happened — on September 30th, the FCC voted to remove the secondary amateur allocation on 3.3-3.5 GHz to open up space for 5G wireless systems. It'll be a phased withdrawal of privileges (see News Bytes on page 9) but it reinforces our earlier message that these bands are of great value to the commercial wireless world and if we don't make better use of them, we will surely lose more of them.

Be thankful for the wide array of frequencies available to us as amateurs, along with everything else discussed above, and do your best to have a Happy Thanksgiving. — 73, W2VU