

## Half Empty or Half Full?

This month's reader survey results caught me somewhat off-guard, and while my initial reaction was negative, a look at the same statistics by our publisher, K2MGA, drew a decidedly positive response. I guess it's a case of whether the glass is half empty or half full. The questions were asked in March and the topic was multi-ham families. We wondered how many of you have family members, either immediate or extended, who are hams, and how much influence you have exerted on each other regarding ham radio. We also asked who or what your primary influence was in becoming a ham. I'm not going to repeat all the numbers here (they're on p. 40), except to touch on some of the major points. Plus, I fully realize that these results are not scientific—they represent a self-selected group of a few hundred readers out of a total in the tens of thousands—but generally, they're accurate enough to give us a broad-brush look at what our readers are thinking.

The good news is (half-full) that one in every three CQ readers comes from a multi-ham family (the half-empty side, of course, is that two out of three don't). But let's apply that figure to our total U.S. ham population of 656,000 (as of 3/31/08, per AH0A). Simple math says that nearly 230,000 of us live in multi-ham families. Of course, CQ readers tend to be more active than the average licensee, but it's still pretty impressive at one in four (164,000) or even one in five (131,000). Add to that the 28% of CQ readers who say a member of their extended family is licensed (the initial 35% was for immediate family). That's another 183,000, not including overlap. Now 35 plus 28 equals 63% of CQ readers reporting that at least one member of their immediate or extended families is also a ham. If you deduct for overlap, then you're probably still sitting around 50%. Maybe that glass is half full after all!

### Get on it, Gramps!

The greatest family influence seems to extend only one generation, with percentages ranging between 10 and 20 for other hams in the family who are parents, siblings, spouses, children, in-laws, aunts/uncles, or cousins. Yet only 2% reported that their grandparents were hams and 3% that their grandchildren are amateurs. With the bulk of our readership being over age 55, there is a great opportunity here to pass on the excitement and magic of ham radio to our grandchildren. We need to make a greater effort in that arena. Of course, the approach will have to be a little different. What excites grandpa may not have the same effect on grandkids. But there is

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so much going on in our hobby (and I'm sure that as a loyal CQ reader, you are up-to-date on all of it!), that you should be able plant some seeds.

We've got satellites (how many other hobby groups have their own *fleet* of satellites—that they've designed and built themselves?); we've got software-defined radios for folks who are more comfortable with ones and zeros than with coils and capacitors; we've got bunches of keyboard modes (see this month's "Digital Connection" column on p. 54) for those more comfortable in front of a computer screen than a microphone; we get to "play with meteors," as my son is fond of saying (WSJT is another keyboard mode that N2IRZ doesn't even get to this month); we have our own "secret code" (yes, kids get *excited* by Morse code, not turned off); and isn't it cool that stuff happening on the sun *really* is important to us? It's all in the presentation, folks. Of course, you've got to know at least a little bit about what you're talking about (kids can smell a phony a mile away) and learning about some of this stuff may require you to venture beyond your comfort zone, but isn't that what learning is all about?

When we asked about family members who are potential hams, 4% of you said yes, one of your relatives is interested and working on a license, and another 22% said yes, he or she has expressed some interest. Again, expand that to the "amateur radio universe" in the U.S. of 656,000. That works out to 26,000 family members working on their licenses and another 144,000 showing interest. Moving more of those 144,000 into the "working on his/her license" category is our challenge, followed, of course, by getting them licensed and active.

### Primary Influences

This brings me back to the half-empty side, because one particular part of the answer to the question about your primary influence in becoming a ham was somewhat disturbing. First of all, 31% of you replied that a friend was your primary influence (vs. just 10% for relatives), followed by 23% who were motivated by reading about ham radio, and 21% who were influenced by observing ham radio activity. This means that Field Day and other public events are critically important for our future, as are all the articles that we are always trying to get into local news media. But the choke point appears to be follow-up.

Example: Recently, NASA Astronaut Garrett Reisman, KE5HAE, made a ham radio contact from the International Space Station back to his hometown middle school in Parsippany, New Jersey, which he attended in the 1980s. It was front-page news in the daily regional newspaper.

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How many potential hams may we get in the near (or even distant) future as a result of that contact and the news coverage it received? That all depends on the follow-up, and most often, the “agent” for that follow-up is the local amateur radio club. The disturbing statistic from our survey? Only 5% of *CQ* readers responding credited their local radio club with being their primary influence in becoming a ham. Another 8% cited school radio clubs, which were much more likely to exist when many of our readers were first licensed than they are today. So that leaves the ball in the hands of the local radio clubs, and in all too many cases, it appears that those clubs are dropping the ball.

In this instance, the results might be better than average, because the club facilitating the space station contact was the New Providence Amateur Radio Club, featured in these pages last October for its innovative ham radio summer camp program. This is a club that understands community involvement. There are others. ARRL Executive Vice President Dave Sumner, K1ZZ, points out in his May

*QST* editorial that analysis of licensing information and ARRL membership activity suggests there are “hot spots” around the country “where newcomers are joining our ranks in relatively large numbers compared to other areas.” One reason he cites is local radio clubs that have “made a commitment to reach out to the community ... with a program to bring friends and neighbors from a vague awareness of Amateur Radio all the way to being active radio amateurs.” Dave’s challenge to other clubs is to learn from these examples. Our reader survey statistics suggest that many of these clubs have a long way to go.

One challenge for the ARRL is to most effectively share the “secrets of successful clubs” with all the rest, and to make those “other” clubs more aware of the resources and information it already makes available (as, for example, on its Club Companion web page at <<http://www.arrl.org/FandES/field/club/>>). There is a tendency in Newington to believe that once something appears in *QST* or is posted on the ARRL website, then everybody who needs to know about it does and

always will. The truth is—as they know very well in the advertising department (theirs and ours)—getting your message out once is not enough. It needs to be repeated regularly to be most effective, regardless of whether you’re “selling” widgets or information.

This is also understood by the ARRL’s Field Day planners, who have scheduled the event at the same time, the fourth weekend in June, every year for decades. It is, collectively, our “ham radio sales weekend” each year. We put on a display for the general public, but it is not only for them. We also give ourselves, as well as newer operators, an opportunity to try—and maybe “buy”—new bands or modes and to try out contesting in a fun, family-oriented atmosphere.

Family ... that’s where we started out. But it bears repeating. Let’s make sure that Field Day as well as other operating activities are as family-oriented as possible, so that those 144,000 relatives showing “some interest” in ham radio can get an opportunity to see first-hand just how fun and magical it can be.

— 73, W2VU

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