

# Half Empty or Half Full Redux

**B**ack in June, I wrote an editorial titled “Half Empty or Half Full?” which discussed our reader survey results that month about multi-ham families. I was a little unhappy that the survey showed that two out of three CQ readers were the only hams in their families. On the other hand, our publisher, K2MGA, thought it was great that one of every three CQ readers came from a multi-ham family. Dick’s logic eventually won out and he converted me from “half empty” to “half full” on the matter. I’m bringing that back up because just a few weeks later, I had another “half-empty/half-full” experience that kind of fits right in with June’s discussion.

At the end of May, en route to the Rochester Hamfest, I stopped off at Syracuse University, where my son, Dan (KC2OOM), had an appointment. I noticed what looked like a ham satellite antenna on the roof of the engineering building and figured that while Dan was in his meeting, I would go look for a ham radio club. The half-empty part of the story is that apparently, the ham club at Syracuse is inactive, and those antennas aren’t connected to anything. But the process of finding that out provided the half-full portion of the story. The university’s visitor center and information office was in the same building as Dan’s appointment, so I figured I’d start there. As the very nice lady in the office started searching for a ham club on her computer (even though she said she didn’t think there was one), one of the people who works in the office sat down in the reception area with his lunch and, listening to our conversation, said, “My brother’s a ham.” At that point, the lady doing my search looked over at him and said, “Really? My son is a ham, too.” And he’s in high school, by the way.

One question our survey didn’t (and couldn’t) ask was what percentage of the non-ham public is related to at least one ham. There may be “only” 650,000 of us out there, but virtually all of us have relatives who know that we’re hams and have some idea of what ham radio is about. Let’s say that, on average, each of us has four relatives with at least a passing understanding of amateur radio. That 2.6 million people. Add the 650,000 licensed hams in the U.S., and that’s a group of more than 3 million people with at least a basic understanding of who we are and what we do. And that doesn’t include friends, neighbors, and co-workers who know that we’re hams. If you add them in, you’ve probably got more than 10 million people in this country who know a ham and (hopefully) think ham radio is a good thing. And the fact that we are spread across all parts of society (see last month’s “Zero Bias”) helps even more.

## Don’t be a “Justa”

Speaking of there being “only” 650,000 licensed hams in the United States, I made time at the Rochester Hamfest to attend a forum on mentoring—one of my favorite soapbox topics—presented by ARRL Membership Manager Katie Breen, W1KRB. Katie has three characteristics that are *not* widely shared among her colleagues on the ARRL staff who normally attend hamfests and present the “public face” of the League. She is: (1) young, (2) female, and (3) a relatively new ham. This is a powerful combination, since we’re trying to attract new people to the hobby who are (1) young, (2) female as well as male, and (3) (obviously) not already experienced hams; and her job is to try to find those people and bring them first into ham radio and second into ARRL membership.

One of Katie’s major points in her forum is that you don’t need to be a veteran ham to help mentor others. She used her own experiences at ARRL Headquarters as an example. As a new ham with a minimal station at home, she was looking for operating help from experienced hams

and operating time at a better-equipped station. W1AW isn’t generally a good place to learn, because of a tight bulletin and code-practice schedule and visitors wanting to operate the world’s most famous ham station. But little-known to the outside world is W1HQ, the ARRL staff radio club, with its own station hidden away in the recesses of 225 Main St. Apparently, that wasn’t too good a place to learn, either, because it was set up for single-person operation, was kind of dingy and not-too-well equipped, and, well, nobody really used it much.

Katie was one of two League staffers who spearheaded an effort to spruce up the station and get it active again. Part of that effort was to get other staffers who were licensed but not active to help others *get* licensed and *get* active. She said several people she approached were hesitant, saying, “I can’t do that; I’m just a Technician,” or “I’m just a new ham myself.” Her response, to them and to us in the audience: “Don’t be a *justa*.” Don’t put yourself down and don’t minimize your ability to help others, she said. Even if you’re still new at something, helping someone else get up to speed can increase your own skills and confidence. The result at W1HQ was a refurbished station and a newly active staff radio club. (For more on the revitalization of W1HQ, see <<http://www.arrl.org/news/stories/2008/02/13/101/?nc=1>>).

There are several lessons here that should be taken to heart by radio clubs, especially those having trouble getting people to come out to meetings and activities: (1) *Any* radio club can go through a slow period. If the ARRL’s staff radio club can become nearly inactive and then recover, so can yours. (2) All it takes is one “spark-plug” to get things moving again. It doesn’t have to be (and maybe shouldn’t be) a club elder or a superham. If you’ve got someone with interest and enthusiasm who’s willing to take on the challenge, hand him or her the ball, but be sure to provide backup in terms of support and resources to succeed. (3) There should be no “justas” in your club. Everyone should be encouraged to make the most of his/her abilities and to help others, regardless of whether that person is “justa” new ham or “justa” Technician. (4) A club station can be a focal point for building up club activity, so if you have the facilities available, do your best to make it available to members whenever possible. (5) Success builds on itself. When people start hearing that your club is active and vital, more of them will start coming out to meetings and activities. At the same time, club leaders need to make sure there are interesting speakers and activities to hold the interest of these new and returning members. So if your club is struggling, try to find a Katie out there, provide support and resources, and let him/her loose on your local ham community.

## YHOTY

A funny thing happened on the way to the nominating deadline for this year’s Newsline Young Ham of the Year award (CQ is a co-sponsor and I am a member of the judging committee). Two weeks before the May 30 deadline, we had no nominations. None. Zero. Worried, award coordinator Bill Pasternak, WA6ITF, e-mailed everyone he could think of with reminders about the upcoming deadline. Well, whatever he did, it worked. By the time the deadline arrived, we had nearly 30 nominations in hand, most likely a record. As I write this, the judging is still going on, so I have no idea who will win. But having read all 30 of those nominations, I can say with confidence that the future of our hobby is in good hands. We’ve got some great kids out there, doing great things, and it’s important that they and their efforts be recognized, even if they’re “justa” bunch of kids! Perhaps *because* “justa” bunch of kids! Congratulations to all the nominees. Each one of you is a winner, and the glass is definitely half full. Maybe even more than half.

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