

From the Editor

Of course contesting needs to change.

That's why contesting is always changing.

Are the gateways to contesting changing?

By the time you read this, ARRL Field Day will be in the rearview mirror. In the *NCJ* profiles K6MM has done, the interviews I've done, the "Next-Gen Contesters" articles by Neil, WB9VPG, or "The Little Pistol Pages" by Mike, VE3GFN, we've seen that for US/VE operators, Field Day is the most commonly cited "gateway drug" leading to long-term addiction to contesting.

There is a bit of chicken and egg there — quite often we hear "I got interested in contesting after I joined the XYZ club and they invited me to join them in Field Day." Joining the club probably increased the odds a newbie would become a long-time ham. Then, FD operation gave them a taste of the fun of working lots of people from lots of places over a weekend.

That connection is one reason I've reached out to contesting clubs to submit "Meet the XYZ Club" articles for *NCJ* — this month the Arizona Outlaws Contest Club is featured. One common element we've seen in most of those pieces is club award/medal programs to increase the club's score in various club competitions. That leads to more butt-in-chair time and more contest QSOs being made. Many contesters have dual club memberships — a contesting club and a local "general purpose" club. Encouraging the non-contest club to have an activity

awards program can help feed the contest op pipeline.

At the Dayton Hamvention Contesting Forum, moderator Doug, K1DG, closed with a panel of ops representing the two biggest contest sponsors: John, K1AR, of the World Wide Radio Operators Forum that now oversees the CQ WW extended family of contests after the demise of CQ magazine, and Bart, W9JJ, and Paul, N1SFE, as the ARRL contest reps. One of the major topics was about change to attract younger people to contesting, with a lot of discussion about gamification — would making radiosport more like multiple-player online gaming attract new contesters?

Personally, I don't think online gaming and radiosport/contesting are all that similar. In gaming, the human communications part is just for entertainment or for team coordination, and the growth in skills is in finger twitching and strategies that really only exist during the game. Contesting is about communicating accurately and rapidly over conditions that exist in real life on Monday when you sit down to work that new DXpedition or go out the next weekend to put your local park on the air.

I've always liked the term "radiosport" because I think contesting comes close to a slightly (OK, totally) less aerobic version of the biathlon event in the Winter Olympics that combines cross-country skiing (in contesting parlance, "running" and "searching") with rifle target shooting ("pouncing"). Instead of rifles, we carry keyboards, keys, and mics, and the forest consists of wires and towers (OK, I better not push this too far...).

Back in 1999, Rol, K3RA, wrote an article for *QST* on all the changes Field Day has gone through since 1933 — that "gateway" has changed a lot since then. Back in 2011, I wrote an article in *CQ* on the changes the WPX contest had gone through since it started in 1962. Change is a constant in contesting.

Today, there are more than 650 active contests listed on WA7BNM's Contest Calendar. Continual "contests" for collectors (SOTA, POTA, lighthouses, trains, castles, etc.) that are on 24 × 7 aren't even included in that. I think those "Anyplace on the Air" ops — both activators (runners) and chasers (S&Pers) — are going to be a big portion of younger contesters if the contesting community clears a few paths for them.

Fifteen years from now, one of them (Lighthouse Digital Sprint Stakes QSO Rave, maybe) will be bringing new hams into contesting, and more changes will happen to the legacy contests. That's a good thing. What has never resulted in real change is the "contesters are all 70 years old and will die soon" reason. As soon as Sweepstakes was over after the CQ-CONTEST reflector came online in the early 1990s, there were endless threads about how few CKs (first year licensed) started with an 8x or a 9x.

On the grand bell curve of contesters, on the fringes are those who mainly just make noise (everything sucks/change it all/everything is perfect/all change is bad), and in the middle is where the real work gets done over time. By every metric, contesting is still growing, and continual (not rapid, but continual!) change is one reason that continues to be true.