

# A Message from the Editor

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as the new editor of *NCJ*. The list of call signs of those who have held this job over the years reads like a contesting hall of fame — literally in many cases. I am particularly humbled to be following the footsteps of Kirk Pickering, K4RO, who has done such an outstanding job in managing and growing *NCJ*.

I am a big believer in setting goals and then surpassing them. So, my first task is to try to forge a clear understanding of exactly where we want *NCJ* to go, in terms of its visibility and penetration in all things contesting. Are we a specialty magazine for the hard-core contesters? Are we a gateway for the broader ham radio universe to sample and learn about our sport? I think that just as the ARRL is synonymous with ham radio, *NCJ* could be *the* face of contesting.

One thing that has really changed over the years is radiosport's strength and vitality throughout the world, especially in regions where it remains a youth-friendly pastime. Perhaps *NCJ* should pay more attention to this trend. A lot of innovation, creativity, and energy on the world contesting scene exists beyond the shores of North America, and we can — and should — offer at least a representative sample.

There are clear challenges for print publications in the Internet age. I don't profess any secret wisdom for knowing how to navigate the waters to succeed as a subscription print medium with a multi-week lead time in a world where expectations of free and instant information availability abound. But I know we can offer something distinctive and valuable — enjoyment, inspiration, and perhaps a bit of education, too.

I come to contesting as a station builder and contest operator. I know that a lot of people totally devoted to contesting have just as much passion for building and planning as they do for operating. I want to make sure that *NCJ* always has something for them. I also think we can profitably coexist with the Internet, perhaps even reviewing the most relevant and interesting posts for readers on a regular basis.

My biography is not really very interesting. While accepting his CQ Contesting Hall of Fame Award at Dayton years ago, Frank Donovan, W3LPL, spoke for a lot of us when he said that he "couldn't imagine doing anything else." I've been doing it since age 11, contesting my way through college and graduate school, now plying my trade as an economist, directing a business re-

search center at the University of Montana since 2007. Along the way I've had the good fortune of making many lifelong friends and operating at such world-class stations as N4AR, K3LR, and NK7U. My station in Montana is my third multi-tower station, and I've learned a few lessons along the way. I'm mostly a CW guy, but I do dust off the mic every now and then. I've got a very understanding wife who is a much tougher editor than I'll ever be, and two adult children who live in Chicago.

The more interesting and more valuable thing to know is what *you* want — and expect — out of *NCJ*. What kinds of things would give you the sort of pleasure that only a print publication can provide? Which insights and information would help and inspire you? Let us know.

## About This Issue

As these words are written, we are still coming down from what was arguably the best World Radiosport Team Championship event to date — WRTC 2014 in New England. It was a great event, capping off what is turning out to be a fantastic year for contesting. Despite talk of another Maunder Minimum, the sun has been active, and the bands are hopping. Those of us who are getting long in the tooth know that conditions might be a lot different when the *next* cycle peaks.

The discussions at WRTC were memorable and inspirational. Meeting and talking with all of those successful, passionate people inspired me to actually fix a few things around my station. This got me to thinking: Why don't we talk more about *fixing* stuff? Station maintenance isn't glamorous, but without it we're soon off the air. So, I asked a fellow who's forgotten more about fixing things than I'll ever know — Mike, W9RE — to jot down a few things to share with us, and I hope we'll be seeing Mike's advice on a regular basis in these pages.

I was also struck at WRTC by how many passionate, knowledgeable, enthusiastic US contesters do not have their own stations at home — and how many are apparently resigned to that status. Of course, in today's era of homeowners associations and the dreaded deed covenants, conditions, and restrictions (CC&Rs), finding suitable real estate has become a challenge. But some hams continue to rise to the challenge. I was happy that one of those guys who builds stations where he goes — Ray, K9RS — is willing to share some of his ideas. Any way you slice it,

fewer contest stations adds up to fewer contest contacts.

## Phone Sprint Cancellation

The 2014 September running of the phone North American Sprint attracted just 52 logs, and we estimate that approximately 3500 contacts took place. By contrast, operators taking part in the CW Sprint the previous weekend logged nearly 10 times that number. The winner's log in the 2014 phone Sprint, which had excellent conditions, contained 217 contacts. Ten years ago in the 2004 September phone Sprint, 20 entries showed higher QSO totals — and the winner logged 322 contacts.

For the past five phone Sprints, the number of logs received has looked like this: September 2012 — 58 logs; March 2013 and September 2013, 91 logs each; March 2014 — 79 logs, and September 2014 — 52 logs. These declines occurred despite a changeover in contest management (N6WM taking over for K4MA) and active cheerleading over the past few years by phone Sprint devotees. Lacking a critical mass of participants, however, the nature of the competition changes significantly — with winning scores built upon recruiting non-participants, coaching them into giving the proper exchanges, etc — and the operating experience that continues to make the CW Sprint so special is essentially lost.

The reasons for the decline are not obvious. Certainly there is a lot more competition for contesters these days, with the number of operating events on any given weekend approaching double digits. Other reasons are more speculative. Many participants dread the last few hours of the contest when 75 meter occupancy is at a peak, due to the risk of conflict with nets or with some of the less civil occupants of that band. The frequency-hopping nature of the contest makes it a difficult neighbor with nets and other non-contest activities more prevalent on SSB. It also makes it more difficult for casual participants to jump in.

We have reluctantly concluded that *NCJ* should discontinue its support for the SSB Sprint, which is why it's absent from our 2015 contest schedule. SSB Sprint enthusiasts plan to continue the event at or near its traditional dates. Know, however, that *NCJ*'s support for innovative, challenging and unique contests continues, and we are open to trying something new for our SSB-oriented readers in the future. Let us hear *your* thoughts.