

A Message from the Editor

Shutting Down Conversations

There is an old joke about two men trapped for eternity on a desert island. They've told every story and joke to each other that they know of. So, in the interest of efficiency, they decide to number them. "Number 47," one of them says with a grin, and they both laugh.

Sorry, that's the end of the joke. (You know it's a bad joke when you have to say this). I tell it here, because it comes to my mind often after reading discussions on the various Internet reflectors devoted to contesting and station building. Some of the topics on those venues come up again and again. How can contest scoring be made more fair? Should unassisted operating categories be abolished? Why do people send cut numbers? There is a certain familiarity to the logic — and even the emotions — that comes up in the various message threads on these and other perennial topics, and I suspect the delete keys on many contesters' computers are well exercised as the messages fly by on our screens.

There's another familiar comment made in most of these discussions: "We've already discussed this." It's one that comes naturally to contesters, of course. As we all know, dupes don't count. In fact, they can be annoying. So, it is with a sense of irritation that some of us are moved to cut off these discussions before they get started — especially since they are not nearly as compact as the numbered stories of my lousy joke.

But there's something we should remember before we reflexively clear our throats and plead to tamp down conversations on these familiar topics. For some people these are *not* familiar at all. We're not a couple of guys on a desert island; the contesting community is constantly changing and evolving, across ages and international boundaries. New people are checking it out for the first time, others are returning to it after spells of inactivity.

Just because the same people do most of the talking on contest reflectors doesn't mean there aren't *new* people listening, reading, and learning. It has always amazed me how some folks simply "ap-

pear" in our hobby — new calls, new stations, and many new plans. What bounces off of our thick skulls that have heard it before can be absorbed by them like a sponge. They may even have a different perspective that hasn't occurred to us. At the very least we could provide links to the earlier conversations to help bring these newer participants up to speed.

The Economics of Ham Radio Contest Stations

Ham radio contest stations and automobiles have a lot in common as investments. They can cost a lot of money. They depreciate almost immediately. (Try selling your new antenna for what you paid for it). And they sit in the dark, unused, most of the time. You might be proud of your fancy new Tesla car sitting in the garage, or your 3 element 40 meter beam gleaming in the sky in your back yard. But the return you are getting on the money spent on those things is zero for much of the time.

This point has come to my mind every time I have pulled up stakes and built a new contest station. Might it be possible, I have thought, to find another ham whose needs don't conflict with mine to share in the ownership and cost? It wouldn't work, of course, if we both wanted to operate the CW Sprint or the CQ WW. But perhaps my mythical business partner might be a VHF contester, or a RTTY enthusiast, or someone who just likes to work DX. Perhaps we could both enjoy the benefits of a big station for half the cost.

Such collaborations do exist, with varying degrees of success. Certainly shared ownership brings headaches, not the least of which is the obvious fact that, unless you are looking for a roommate, one or both of you is going to be making a drive. Remote radio technology is changing that, of course. But the various consortia of operators with financial interests in a common station have non-trivial issues to manage in coming up with fair ways to share in both the sweat and the financial costs of maintenance.

This is why the growth of business operations such as W2RE and WW2DX's Remote Ham Radio venture is so intriguing. Some are uncomfortable with the notion of paying someone to use a station — especially in a hobby that has always stressed

its non-commercial nature. But to my mind, it is no different than sending a check to a ham radio distributor to pay for your radio. You are paying full freight for what you use, of course. All of the acquisition, construction, maintenance, and depreciation costs of the contest station you connect to are reflected in the rates charged. If they were not, they wouldn't stay in business. The difference is that you pay for what you use.

The economist in me thinks this is pretty neat. As a personal choice, though, I have never been tempted to just hook up my headphones and keyer paddle to a box and station that someone else has put together. I have to admit that I get just as much fun and satisfaction out of planning and building stations as I do operating them. Perhaps someday I will give that up. But not just yet. I do like to see that shiny aluminum in my back yard, even if I do pay for the privilege.

A New Leader at the Helm

This issue of *NCJ* comes toward the end of the third year that I have been honored to serve as editor. As I said in my first issue on the job, the list of people who have served in this role reads like a *Who's Who of Contesting*. Some fantastic folks and legendary operators are on that list.

That list will get a little longer beginning with the first issue of 2018. I'm delighted to share with you the news that assuming the role as editor of *NCJ* beginning with the January/February issue will be none other than Dr. Scott Wright, KØMD. It seems fitting that *NCJ* return to the state of Minnesota where it all started under the tutelage of Tod Olson, KØTO (SK). You've still got me to kick around for one more issue, but plan on an upgrade in the very near future.

Whoops!

I take full blame for busting the call sign of DL1QQ on the cover of the last issue. Sandy is a great operator and wonderful ambassador for the upcoming WRTC 2018 in Germany, and she was our house guest for 8 days last summer here in Montana. You'd think I'd know her call sign. We apologize for not catching the error.