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A Learning Movement

“Today, knowledge is acquired in ways that are entirely new and unfamiliar to many of us. Knowledge in print transforms into other media: apps, tablets and smartphones, video, and podcasts. To reach the desired destination, we must explore new pathways for imparting knowledge.”

Some of you know that, in summer, ARRL conducts programs that aim to introduce fundamentals of electronics and radio frequency to several dozen teachers around the US. This is the task of the Teachers Institute (TI), a 15-year effort funded entirely by our members' contributions and by other patrons. Teachers attend *gratis*. By many measures, this year's class was exceptional. We had an astronomy professor from a major midwestern university, a space program director from a Dakotas university, and a host of talented middle and high school teachers from public, independent, and charter schools from everywhere else.

They were carefully selected. They worked hard together, as a cohesive team. Call them the class of 2017. Many told me that they will return to their fall classrooms energized. Lucky kids! If you check our social media accounts, you can see their photos and videos, wiring up breadboards or chasing robots down our hallways. TI has represented the central, but not exclusive, thrust of ARRL's education efforts over the past decade or so. We know that it is necessary, but perhaps it's not sufficient. What the program gains in intensity, it lacks in scope.

And those of you who closely read the board minutes from July know that a team of senior staffers has been studying a thorny pattern among our newest hams. Each year, we license tens of thousands of new Amateur Radio operators, but nearly half of them never get on the air. Ever. Not only a thorny problem: it's an existential issue. Our team has conducted extensive, painstaking research about this group, with surveys and phone calls, industrial-strength market research. We ask them "why," and typically they reply: they simply don't know how. What they lack is stuff that's easy for the rest of us: How to select a transceiver, begin a contact, build and install an antenna, choose a power supply. They lead busy lives, have little affinity for clubs, *QST* is too technical; by nature, they're not joiners, and according to them, there is a terrible shortage of suitable mentors. But they are motivated by an interest in Amateur Radio.

I reflect on my own early experience. My mentor, Dr. Jim Davis, KG4ZWS, stopped by at Headquarters last June. We grew up together, but we hadn't visited in 50 years. In our youth, our garages were home to half a dozen projects in various stages of completion. We constructed homebrew and kits, etched circuit boards in vile compounds, rescued heavy iron from the scrap dealer. We built antennas, HF rhombics, and massive tuning networks of coiled copper tubing to tame them. Along the way, Jim explained each element, each adjustment. I've

come to appreciate that his gift to me was not only the know-how that derives from hands-on experience, it was also the confidence inspired by a peer. If he could, then why — he explained archly — couldn't I? *You can do this* was the message; and a ham ticket and a commercial license followed. Not enough peers like Jim.

I know — you're busy, too.

Times change. People change. We serve many functions at ARRL, but in some respects, we discover we are in the knowledge business. We are caretakers of accumulated institutional knowledge, enormous stores of book titles, publications, magazine articles, online information acquired over a century. Relationships in Congress, with municipal governments, regulators, with first responders. The ARRL Laboratory. Add to this the vast tribal know-how of an entire community. (That would definitely be you.) New members of our community — although not all new hams are young — made the considerable investment of time and energy to earn a license, and must acquire that tribal know-how to engage fully in our community. Today, knowledge is acquired in ways that are entirely new and unfamiliar to many of us. Knowledge in print transforms into other media: apps, tablets and smartphones, video, and podcasts. We must now transfer the knowledge and the know-how that enables their meaningful participation, and do it in the ways that they are open to receive it. The task ought not be difficult: some of these newcomers belong to the most educated and affluent generation in history. Get them on the air. Get them engaged.

Amateur Radio permits anyone to acquire as much knowledge as he or she wishes, to delve as deep as they want. It can be an odyssey of learning. Viewing the 2018 *ARRL Handbook*, an intimidating tome for a beginner, I observe that there's a lifetime of learning between those two covers. So why confine our efforts to the needs of newcomers? There's a lifetime of learning ahead for all of us. Let us rededicate ourselves to being both custodians and distributors of this knowledge. At the same time, we continue to find new pathways of learning. The Teachers Institute class of 2017 is the frontier. But the frontier extends well beyond the classroom. Let's get behind them for a lifetime of learning.

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