

From the Editor

Greetings for 2020! I trust your holiday season and the early winter contest season went well. Band conditions remain where we typically would expect at the bottom of the sunspot cycle, but there are surprises. Work and a lot of media interviews in November kept me off the air for much of the month. I arrived home from New York late on Saturday afternoon of the CQ World Wide CW. I got on the air for a couple of hours around 9 PM and was very surprised at the excellent propagation on 40 – 160 meters. Those were some of the most enjoyable hours I have spent contesting recently. My experience demonstrates that the bands are often open, and especially so during contests. So, if you missed the CQ WW CW, give the ARRL International DX and *NCJ*'s NAQPs a try. You may be surprised.

Digital *NCJ*

Let me repeat. *Digital NCJ*. ARRL CEO Howard Michel, WB2ITX, announced in January *QST* that *NCJ* (and *QEX* — a *Forum for Communications Experimenters*) will become available as a digital edition in 2020, at some point to every ARRL member at no additional cost. A print edition will continue for paid *NCJ* subscribers, as long as subscriptions and ad revenue continue to cover publication costs. This is a win-win for *NCJ*, ARRL, and the contest community. Please drop Howard a note of thanks (wb2itx@arrrl.org).

Exciting Things in Store for 2020

Some bright spots are on the horizon in 2020. “Next-Gen Contesters” columnist Neil Rapp, WB9VPG — a successful mentor of amateur radio activity within the younger generation — has organized a YOTA (Youth on the Air) camp near Dayton Hamvention at the National Voice of America Museum of Broadcasting. It will take place June 21 – 26, just ahead of ARRL Field Day. More information is in his column in this month's issue. I urge the contest community to get behind the YOTA event.

Fred, AB1OC, and Anita AB1QB, Kemmerer — in association with the Nashua Area Radio Society (NARS) in New Hampshire — were featured on “Ham Nation” last November. NARS was the 2019 Hamvention Club of the Year. Check out their interview with Bob Heil, K9EID, and colleagues. It is simply amazing! They have trained and recruited more than 200 new club members and created opportunities for a large number of new under-18-year-old new hams.

One such operator, Abby Finchum, AB1BY, has developed into quite a good contesteer. Take a look at her awards on QRZ.com. Fred mentioned on the show that she was able to do SO3R FT8 during ARRL Field Day in June 2019. *Wow!* Abby and her fellow teen operators were nearly able to match QSO for QSO the numbers made during ARRL Field Day by the CW and SSB stations combined.

In a related vein, Fred and Anita are planning a new contest in 2020 — a Student/Teacher contest. Stay tuned for more information. *NCJ* gladly supports this effort and others aimed at promoting contesting among newcomers.

Propagation. Will it improve in 2020? Perhaps a little, but you can read the predictions of Carl Luetzelschwab, K9LA, in this issue. Regardless, our state-of-the-art technology in HF receivers, antennas, and noise mitigation will make contesting viable and fun during 2020. Make an effort to try a new contest — whether it's the CW Sprint, the NAQPs, the ARRL DX contests, or the CQ WPX contests this year. Set some goals, write them down, and see how close you come.

Tower Safety and Ham Deaths

A number of ham radio tower-related fatalities occurred in 2018 and 2019. *NCJ* featured a story about Paul Bittner, WØAIH, as one example. Tower-related injuries and deaths are complex events likely due to multiple factors, but some commonalities apply to these tragic events. Jim Idelson, K1IR, has done a root-cause analysis of these deaths and injuries and produced a YouTube video offering advice and safety tips. His pre-

sentation has received widespread praise on the internet reflectors. Thanks, Jim, for tackling this issue and providing strong leadership for the ham community. Take time before your spring antenna work to watch the video.

Looking Ahead

This issue is our largest *ever*, but even so, we had to push several articles into the March/April issue, as we ran out of space. Looking ahead, we will see an article by Peter Chadwick, G3RZP, a well-known RF engineer and past ITU official, whose article calls improving spectral purity in our transmitters. This parallels the November 2019 *QST* article by Rob Sherwood, NCØB. The need for cleaner transmitters to reduce problems — mainly for other operators — during contests is of high importance. Speak with the manufacturers' representatives about this long-standing issue this year at Visalia, Dayton, and other venues. “Product Review” articles on transmitters in *QST* report measured signal purity statistics.

Year Three

This starts my third year as *NCJ* Editor. Thank you for staying with us during these years and for reading the articles and columns we publish. I also want to thank Fred Regennitter, K4IU, for his work as Deputy Editor. We are happy to continue serving you and *NCJ*.

I also want to thank all who volunteered to serve on a new task force I'm organizing to promote urban and portable contesting. Opportunities remain, if you want to join our effort.

A Sad Note

Ron Stailey, K5DJ, a well-known RTTY contesteer, died on November 25 at age 75. He created the CQ WW RTTY WPX and the NAQP RTTY. We also lost Paul Newberry, N4PN, right after the ARRL November Sweepstakes CW, at age 68. He was a well-known contesteer and ambassador for ham radio and a past president of the Georgia Contest Group. Our condolences to the families of these exemplary hams and contesters.