Second Century

A Future Beyond Our Imaginations

This column has always served as a forum for the CEO of ARRL to provide commentary on the organization and its future. Having just been elected as the Interim CEO with an uncertain term of office, I thought it would be more valuable for the membership to hear from other members of the ARRL management team, the ones working to shape ARRL's future.

For the next several months, there will be a rotating lineup of guest columnists providing their perspective on the organization and amateur radio. First up is ARRL Director of Operations Norm Fusaro, W3IZ, with others to follow in the coming months.

You may still reach out to me directly at **ceo@arrl.org**.

— Barry J. Shelley, N1VXY, Interim Chief Executive Officer

I took my Novice-class license exam at someone's kitchen table about 36 years ago, when I was in my mid-twenties. I never imagined that one day I'd be working at ARRL, let alone overseeing the DXCC program, playing a role in the ARRL Centennial celebration, co-producing the National Parks on the Air event, or eventually becoming the Director of Operations. No one knows the future. But no matter what, the future eventually arrives, and when it does, it may not be the future you imagined — sometimes it can be even better.

The same can be said for amateur radio. Modern technology makes it possible for today's radio amateurs to operate their station (or someone else's) from a remote location anywhere in the world. This is the future that was envisioned in 1934, in a *QST* article titled "Automatic DX Relay Work for the Ham," and it's turned out even better than the author, D. A. Griffin, W2AOE, imagined. More than a decade before the invention of the transistor and years before the DXCC program was created, hams contemplated the idea of using remote relay stations for "international round-table nets and globe circling relays."

Griffin proposed the notion of W1MK (ARRL's call sign at the time) broadcasting bulletins simultaneously in all 48 states, or being able to hear your own signal coming back to you "via the 'round the world relay." I'm sure this all sounded far-fetched at the time, but today remote operating is easily accomplished with off-the-shelf components. We employ remote receivers at W1AW so the station can be used for making two-way contacts while the bulletins are being broadcast. This is all part of amateur radio today.

When the League was founded, Hiram Percy Maxim, W1AW, saw amateur radio as a valuable way to serve the public. Public service is still a crucial element of the value ham radio provides. However, when it comes to moving traffic, our partners and served agencies expect to see high-speed digital methods using modern communications equipment. This was demonstrated at a joint meeting of top officials with the American Red Cross and FEMA in May 2019. ARRL used W1AW to collect messages digitally from 13 field stations, then relayed the messages to the meeting location in Baltimore, Maryland. Red Cross and FEMA officials were very impressed when they saw high-speed digital messages being printed on a computer screen, configured in the format they were used to seeing.

I'm not advocating for one operating mode over another. Ham radio has many facets, and I enjoy quite a lot of them. Most of my operating time is spent hunting DX in the CW bands. I also use digital modes and participate in the annual AM Rally. Ham radio is an art and, like all art, needs to be appreciated in the context of its medium. Each mode, band, and piece of gear has its own purpose.

High-speed digital communications have been developed to supplement older technology. What's in the future is anyone's guess, but I can assure you that what is state of the art today will eventually be replaced with something new. Agility, not complacency, is going to keep ham radio relevant and ensure our future.

Norm Fusaro, W3IZ
Director of Operations