

What's a club to do?

“Where are the young people? How can we keep them interested in our hobby?” Clubs are experiencing an aging demographic. But rather than despair, local clubs such as the Salt Lake Astronomical Society, Wasatch Camera Club, the Utah Rocket Club and UARC embrace many schemes to swell their members.

What is a club? In my view, it's a group with common interests, an urge to promote them, provide community service, and mentor the next generation. In the remote past, service organizations were networking groups – membership a stepping stone to local power and prestige. Now, clubs serve our hobbies. Here are some observations on our aging membership.

Money and Time

Amateur radio is not particularly expensive unless you succumb to antenna envy, or in other hobbies: aperture envy, lens envy and impulse envy. You can get on the air with a minimal investment.

However, the time commitment is substantial taxing those with young children, two jobs, extended education or odd hours. Studying for licenses, acquiring equipment, setting up the shack and keeping it clean, requires time and solitude difficult to come by.

Many of us started in high school and then lost interest after leaving for college, lost a mentor or couldn't get beyond 5 WPM. Then came career, 60 hour work weeks, children, surfing – no time or money for such frivolity as amateur radio. Many will return to the fold but have other priorities for a long time.

Websites, Social Media

I want to get back into amateur radio. How do I find a local club? If you ask Google for “Salt Lake Amateur Radio” you will find any number of clubs and groups – all with some sort of website and/or social media. These take time to maintain despite the simplicity of WordPress or the like. If dues are collected on line, it's even more work. But without some sort of event calendar, photo

album, and net frequency list there's not much attention. Without frequent updates, potential new members will lose interest quickly. Maintaining the website requires a serious time commitment.

Meeting Attendance

Even before the pandemic, face-to-face social activities were declining. Church services, social clubs, even taverns report diminished attendance particularly among Millennials and Gen Z. Even social interaction through Facebook is declining.

For a club that covers nearly 85,000 square miles, physical attendance is limited to those in the immediate vicinity. Only Zoom and the like will reach remote members.

Club Officer Liability and Burnout

If you keep your fingers out of your final amplifier, amateur radio is not particularly dangerous. But if someone is injured or killed during a club organized event, club officers and organizers can be liable – sued by the survivor's insurance companies or relatives. Club liability insurance is prohibitively expensive and is typically not provided by the national organization. Older club officers and board members with accumulated assets have the most exposure.

Club officers are always on call to answer questions, organize events, and convince others to replace them. This gets old rather quickly.

Career Path

Becoming a radio amateur is not an obvious first step to a rewarding career. Though many of us with engineering backgrounds first turned television sets into radios, this avenue no longer relevant. Offering QSO's to a teenager that can talk anywhere in the world on a pocket cell phone or internet is a tough sell. Other attractions of amateur radio need emphasis.

Do we do anything?

Booths and tables at community events, classroom demonstrations, field days, license classes and service events are all important with UARC

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having an enviable record. But to expect hoards of 20-30 year old hams to take over and do all the work is absurd. This is a long game, they may return when the time is right.