

A turning point in public relations for ARRL came in March when Chief Executive Officer Dave Sumner revealed in his monthly editorial column that the number one goal our members desire for the ARRL's long term strategic plan is ongoing and vigorous promotion of Amateur Radio. Those of us who serve on the Public Relations Committee (PRC) are pleased that the membership has validated ARRL's public relations efforts and wish to see them magnified. We also are aware of the Marketing Department's Zoomerang study which clearly showed that most people got involved in Amateur Radio simply to have fun.

The members' charge comes just as the PRC has begun new programs to address the rapidly changing media landscape. Since my last report just six months ago, several prominent newspapers have closed and the number of people accessing news and information from the internet (instead of traditional outlets) is growing exponentially. ARRL and its members have to adapt to this new environment to continue to convey the role Amateur Radio plays in American life as a hobby, as an emergency resource, and as a hands-on laboratory for communications innovation.

Under the leadership of ARRL Media & Public Relations Manager Allen Pitts, W1AGP, many new tools became available in the first half of 2009. Foremost was the introduction of ARRL's newest course, PR-101, which was introduced at the Dayton Hamvention®. Modeled after the format and success of the ARECC courses, PR-101 is designed to raise the professionalism of ARRL appointed field Public Information Officers (PIOs), 75% of whom have no training in journalism or media relations. Allen deftly synthesized public information from many sources on how non-profit organizations can better position themselves in the media, and melded this with submissions from a team of volunteer contributors. Special thanks go to the many volunteers who contributed their time and talents on how PIOs can be more effective and to Allen for finding ways to complete this course in a cost effective manner. Just over 100 course CD-ROMs have been purchased already and 28 have completed the class. We estimate about 15% of PIOs have ordered the course, making it a successful launch, and the PRC is looking for ways to stimulate enrollment and completion. We congratulate those Section Managers who have agreed to help subsidize the \$19.95 cost for the CD-ROM to encourage their PICs and PIOs to take this course.

Another successful program introduction was release of the two "viral" videos. These are high quality video Public Service Announcements (PSAs) which ARRL makes available to broadcast outlets that have been compressed into relatively small, low resolution files. The result is that they can easily be sent by email or attached as a hyperlink in the body or signature of an email. By making them readily accessible through the internet, these PSAs can be uploaded easily onto social networks and shared among friends. The 30 second PSAs "WeDoThat" and one of the two Field Day PSAs were made into "viral" videos and distributed with great success. We see this trend expanding as part of the 21st century movement away from traditional media and towards "citizenship journalism".

PRC members are enthusiastic about the updating and upgrading of the three PR themed websites – “Hello Radio”, “We Do That (Technology)” and “Emergency Radio” – and their increasing integration into the soon to be revamped ARRL main website. The result will be that non Hams with interest in learning more about Amateur Radio will have entry portals tailored to their interests. The www.Hello-Radio.org website is a shining example of what will make the new websites look more appealing to viewers as it emphasizes that, above all, ham radio is *fun!*

The PRC also made an assessment of the Bill Leonard, W2SKE, Professional Media Award. This award is 40 years old, and many former and current PRC members believed it was time to examine its rules, and determine if the award was still relevant in today’s environment. 2008 Philip McGan Award winner and PRC member Walt Palmer, W4ALT, a retired executive from ABC News, headed an ad hoc committee to review the Bill Leonard Award. Walt assembled a distinguished panel of professional working journalists and educators, many of them Hams, and spent almost three months reviewing and discussing the award itself, its \$500 honorarium, and whether the prize is discouraging nominations due to increasing award restrictions on professional journalists by their employers. A resolution¹ is being presented from the PRC to the Board asking for changes which the PRC believes will improve the relevance of the Bill Leonard Award in today’s media environment. Chief among the recommendations from the ad hoc committee are proposals to make three awards rather than one and recognize exceptional work in the areas of video, audio and print/text. Also, the new recommended award amounts of \$250 per category would be given to an I.R.S. recognized charity of the recipient’s choosing. This is designed to remove the appearance of a conflict of interest which is discouraging entries from organizations with monetary prize restrictions for its journalists.

A byproduct of the ad hoc committee was the comment by many journalists that the Bill Leonard Award is not promoted in professional journalism publications and websites. The ad hoc committee advised the PRC to secure funding designated to promote the Leonard Award in media trade journals, so that more reporters might be prompted to cover Amateur Radio. Also reviewed was whether Amateur Radio operators should be prohibited from being nominated. The ad hoc committee felt, and the PRC agreed, that Amateur Radio operators should not be precluded from being nominated, as long as their published or broadcast work related to Amateur Radio appears or is heard outside of Amateur Radio trade media.

The PRC extends its appreciation to those members who retired from the committee at the end of 2008: Bob Josuweit, WA3PZO; Jim McDonald, KB9LEI; Dan McMonigle, N3IXQ; ARRL International V.P. Rod Stafford, W6ROD; and Board Liaison and Asst. Dir. Roanoke Div., Patricia Hensley, N4ROS. Bob Josuweit had ten years of service on the PRC, and Jim McDonald had 8. Joining the PRC in 2009 are Walt Palmer, W4ALT; Gary Wilson, K2GW; Kevin Pauley, KB9WVI and Board Liaison and New England Div. Vice Dir. Mike Raisbeck, K1TWF. They join returning members Don Carlson, KQ6FM; Gordon West, WB6NOA, and Chairman Bill Morine, N2COP. A pleasant addition to the PRC is ongoing guest Peter West, VE3HG, V.P. for Public Relations for RAC, Radio Amateurs of Canada. Since the U.S. and Canada share many common issues, it is logical that Peter, as head of PR for RAC, join us to find common solutions which impact both North American nations and their respective Amateur Radio organizations.

With less than five years to ARRL's centennial, the members of the PRC are excited to have accomplished so much in the first half of 2009 that will position both ARRL and Amateur Radio to be more visible to the public, to the media, and to our own Amateur Radio brethren. However, much remains to be done in the months and years ahead. If ARRL's membership feels that the primary activity that needs to be undertaken in ARRL's strategic plan is the promotion of Amateur Radio, and if most people indeed become hams simply to have some fun, then more resources will need to be allocated in the future to ensure that all constituencies have opportunities to learn more about us, our hobby and our service.

Respectfully submitted,
Bill Morine, N2COP
Chairman – ARRL Public Relations Committee

1 – Resolution text

The Public Relations Committee recommends the following changes to the Bill Leonard, W2SKE, Professional Media Award. These changes would become effective immediately.

- 1) The Award is divided into three categories, each with its own award
 - a. Audio formats
 - b. Visual formats
 - c. Print and Text formats
- 2) Each category is to have an honorarium of \$250.00 for the best selection within that category.
- 3) The PRC can exercise discretion to withhold an award within a category in any give year based on the quality and content of submissions.
- 4) The cash awards will no longer go to the recipients, but rather to Internal Revenue Service 501[c](3) recognized non-profit organizations of the recipients' choosing. The three recipients will still receive personalized plaques.
- 5) Funds to be made available to raise awareness within the professional journalism community regarding the Leonard Award, its availability and criteria. This may include costs for wire releases, mailings and advertising/announcements in trade journals.