



## Second Century

# 5 Years — Better and Worse

*I cannot believe that 5 years have gone by since becoming the CEO of ARRL. When I interviewed in the summer of 2020, President Rick Roderick, K5UR, asked how long I'd be "willing to serve" if elected. Elected? I thought I was being "hired"! I responded that I would be willing to serve at least 10 years, at the pleasure of the organization. Since then, I have told staff that we are going to be taking 10 steps together — each one representing a year. Each step forward is in pursuit of the broad strategic vision of digital transformation and the reintroduction of youth to amateur radio. So, with half the steps behind us, what has progress looked like?*

### Membership & Clubs

Membership, which has remained relatively flat since the early 1980s, is in a recent decline based largely on the restructuring of dues, including charging for print versions of our two member journals that were previously included as a free benefit. ARRL routinely sees a major drop in membership from any annual dues increase, even ones as small as \$5, which is disappointing but is expected.

During the 2010s there were those in the community, including some ARRL leaders, who asserted that radio clubs were dying or dead. In fact, I attended a local club meeting in New Jersey before becoming CEO where the speaker was very pessimistic about clubs and, more broadly, amateur radio. How inspiring! I did not share this vision and have been working hard to give clubs the tools and support to grow and to be more resilient. I am very excited about our 2026 Year of the Club with opportunities to recognize and build up vibrant clubs.

### Spectrum Defense & Legislative

Our spectrum defense continues to be remarkably strong, given how small we are. The role of amateur radio within government circles, including the FCC and international bodies like the ITU, is reasonably well understood. ARRL's resources in Washington, DC are outstanding, supporting our relationships with government agencies and lobbyists advancing our legislative agenda. I am concerned about the IARU and maintaining our role within the organization as it is critical to provide amateur radio with representation at the World Radiocommunication Conferences.

### Financials & Development

ARRL's financial challenges persist. When I came on board, the organization was operating under a deficit-based annual plan, with the full picture obscured by a large, now-forgiven, COVID-era government loan. Given the nature of certain members to look for "value" from our nonprofit, or to react to organizational decisions by ceasing their membership, it is easy to understand how ARRL struggles

financially to serve the needs of amateur radio — not just its members.

ARRL's future financial viability and strength come from our capacity to develop very generous radio amateurs who want to pay the hobby back for a lifetime of enjoyment, camaraderie, and even success in their careers. That generosity has been behind the growth of our Teachers Institute and Collegiate Amateur Radio Program, which are critical for the re-engagement of young people in ham radio.

### Information Technology & Logbook of The World

I have never been a supporter of the notion of "technical debt" and that ARRL should be held to a standard where its systems are the latest, greatest, major IT productions that take significant time and money. Many times, simple solutions to simple problems are completely adequate. During 2024, ARRL was hit with a cyber attack, which was a first for me personally to have to manage. It was very difficult and was done through the din of nonsensical claims and conspiracy theories about what happened.

What did happen, as a direct result of the attack, is that there was a reset of ARRL's security protocols, a standardization of elements of our vast infrastructure of software components, and expanded use of expertise from non-Headquarters staff including third-party monitoring and administration as well as the creation of a Board oversight group called the Information Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC), at my request. Although the time required to make these changes was long, ARRL suffered nearly no downtime of its core member-facing systems.

One very important exception was Logbook of The World. Although LoTW could have been brought back sooner, I was not about to expose it to any risks until the network had been fully reconfigured and tested. LoTW has enjoyed some big updates over the past 5 years, principally in hardware. This past year saw a major replatforming of

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LoTW to being cloud based, and migrating to a new operating system and a new database system. This required extensive testing and closing down LoTW for a few days to complete the migration. LoTW has been functioning spectacularly through all of these changes, and we have a development roadmap that includes a different form of user authentication and its support for administration of ARRL's DXCC program.

### ARRL Management & Governance

The team that I met coming into ARRL was not well structured and departments were stove-piped, meaning they did not collaborate well. My goal was to change that. We needed managers who were not just hams, but subject-matter experts who could understand the needs of our members, while turning them into hams. I could gush about some of the outstanding upgrades we have had during my tenure, but I am gratified that the culture of our staff is far more collaborative and supportive — of members and of each other — starting with my very first column: “A Culture of Yes.”

A small part of our community seems to be fixated on the Board, always seeking or even fictionalizing controversies where there are none. I will say that the Board 5 years ago when I started as CEO seemed tense — a tension that was borne out of the deterioration of the “Gang of Eight” that had been ruling the Board for a year or two. I told the Board I would rip the doors off my office. There would be no issues of transparency — and there have been none. Again, there are certain Board members that know transparency is like clickbait for our members, and when they want attention or an “attaboy,” it rises from the ashes as a new problem for members to focus on.

I have been grateful for the support and the growth that the Board has shown. For the most part, you are lucky to be represented by a dedicated and experienced group of Directors who have been focused on ensuring ARRL has a trusted and high-functioning Board. At nearly every talk I give, I encourage members to read the Board meeting minutes. If you read carefully, and between the lines, you will see the best and the worst of the Board, which isn't nearly as controversial as you have heard or read!

### Emergency Communications & Public Service

I have been very concerned about the role — the required role — amateur radio must play in emergency communications. While the communications world, including terrestrial and satellite systems, has become more resilient and

capable, we seem to be stuck in the past. I caused a stir by writing in my July 2025 CEO report to the Board that ARES is broken. I suggested that it might be a good time to conduct a greenfield exercise to redesign the ARES program. The response from the membership was immediate and varied. We will devote space in 2026 issues of QST to how we can future-proof ARES.

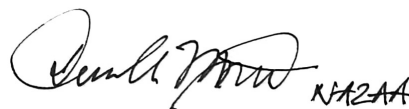
### Amateur Radio at Large

I believe that amateur radio is in a better place than it was 5 years ago. Innovation in radios and in software continues seemingly unbounded. Our modern-day pioneering includes the evolution of digital modes like those supported by WSJT-X, and digital voice and data transmission networks. And programs like Parks on the Air® continue to draw more of our community to the airwaves.

I made it my mission to expand ARRL's relationship with the YouTube community and am extremely happy with joint projects we have worked on, relationships we have built, and how amateur radio benefits from myriad topics covered.

I would be remiss not to point out, as I often do, the harm that persistent negativity can have on amateur radio and ARRL. Our community is small; our total membership wouldn't even fill two football stadiums. When divisive or hostile messages are posted to social media, they don't just stay within our circle — they're seen by regulators, lawmakers, and parents considering whether to introduce their children to our community.

In closing, ARRL is better than it was 5 years ago. And it is worse. We continue to focus on the positive aspects of amateur radio, and the joy and community that it brings into all of our lives. And we acknowledge what's worse, and work every day to make it better. I wish you, your friends, and your family a great 2026, and I hope you'll consider joining us at the ARRL National Convention at the Huntsville Hamfest in August 2026!



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