

Team Exuberance Energizes Young Hams

Allison McLellan

Fourteen-year-old Violetta Latham, KM4ATT, was only 9 when she first got her Amateur Radio license and she quickly made a name for herself as an active young contester. Fifteen-year-old David Samu, VE7DZO, got his license more recently, but was soon everywhere across the radio bands, logging over 15,000 contacts since 2017. When the two teenagers participated in the 2018 Dave Kalter Memorial Youth DX Adventure to Curacao, collaborating and learning with their fellow young hams, they were inspired to foster a similar community in North America.

Along the way, Violetta heard an older ham quote, “Youth and exuberance is no match for old age and treachery.” Inspired to turn that sentiment around, Team Exuberance began to take shape, ready to prove that youth can hold their own in Amateur Radio.

Meet the Team

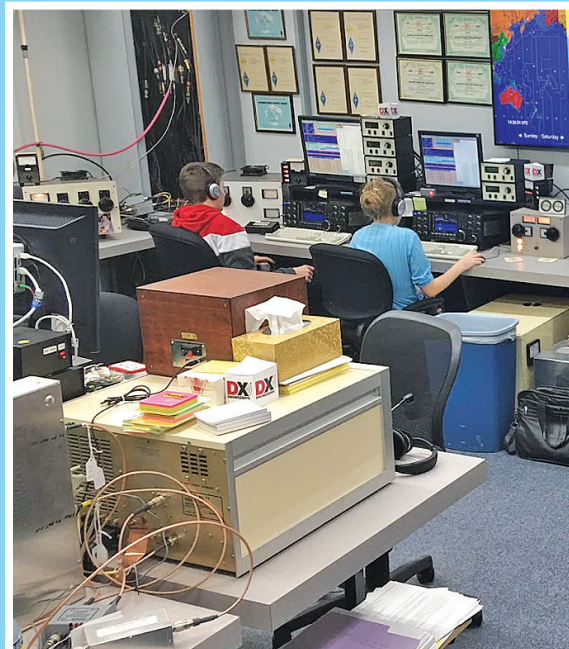
Following the 2018 Dave Kalter Memorial trip, Violetta contacted DX Engineering Chief Operating Officer Tim Duffy, K3LR, to tell him about the idea of forming an all-youth contesting team, and that she wanted to use his re-nowned station as a base.

Tim started construction on his K3LR station in West Middlesex, Pennsylvania, in 1987. While he started out with the simple goal of building a special spot for competing alongside friends, Tim’s station grew in size, power, and reputation in the Amateur Radio contesting community; it now has 11 operating positions, 26 booms, 164 transmitting elements, 11 homebrew 1,500 W amps, and 13 Icom IC-7851 and IC-7850 transceivers.

Surprised and excited, Tim immediately agreed to have an all-youth team compete from K3LR, and the two started seriously planning with the aid of DX Engineering team member Teri Grizer, K8MNJ. The team lineup formed little by little — Tim suggested some young hams with contesting experience, some of whom Violetta and David already knew and had operated with, and those young hams knew others that they then invited. Eventually, they gathered six solid teammates from across the US, Canada, and Hungary, combining a myriad of radio skills and backgrounds.

Marty Sullaway, NN1C, believes Team Exuberance is the first serious contesting team in North America that is comprised entirely of youth. A well-known veteran of several winning contesting teams, 17-year-old Marty quickly took on a co-leader role after he joined Team Exuberance early last year.

Also on the team are 19-year-old Tomi Varro, HA8RT, a Hungarian university student, programming engineer, Young-



The all-youth contesting team achieved the top station in North America during their first operating event together.



Clockwise from the bottom photo:

Tomi, HA8RT (left), and Marty, NN1C (right), ready to go at the top of the hour, with Bryant's, KG5HVO, mother, Lauren Rascoll, KG5TQO, in the background to lend support.

David, VE7DZO (left), and Levi, K6JO, concentrating on 80 meters.

Team Exuberance in action the morning of March 30 as the 2019 CQ World Wide Prefix Contest (phone) kicked off, with Tim Duffy, K3LR, patrolling the equipment.

Violetta, KM4ATT (left), and David, VE7DZO, covering 40 meters.



World Radiosport Team Championships (WRTC) in Germany, winner of the 2018 Bill Pasternak, WA6ITF, Memorial *Amateur Radio Newsline* Young Ham of the Year Award, and profiled in this month's "Member Spotlight" column.

"In [IARU] Region 1 [of Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and northern Asia], there are programs for young contesters like the Youngsters on the Air Youth Contesting Program. Here in North America, those types of programs...don't really exist," Bryant said. "Meeting youth contesters is essential in growing the next generation of radiosport enthusiasts. As great as our connection is across the bands, we need more opportunities to meet in person."

sters On the Air (YOTA) crew member, and experienced multioperator contester; 19-year-old Levi, K6JO, a frequent operator at the NX6T superstation in southern California who often competes internationally, and 15-year-old Bryant Rascoll, KG5HVO, a participant in the 2018

For their debut, the team decided to compete in the 2019 CQ World Wide Prefix Contest (phone), held over the weekend of March 30 – 31, 2019, in the two-transmitter, multioperator category. The contest, known as CQ WW WPX SSB, offers multiple awards in different categories, drawing experienced contesters from around the world every year.

Getting Down to Business

As a co-leader, Marty took on a great deal of the logistical and operational preparation for the team and their accompanying family members. "Imagine taking a group of nine people on a trip somewhere, and handling every detail of it, and then once you get there, scheduling about 56 hours of programming," he said.

First, he made sure all necessary flights to Pennsylvania were booked, and coordinated hotel rooms. He also set up an operator schedule, contest strategy, frequency and propagation strategy, and meal plans. To cover the travel, accommodation, food, and incidental expenses, Violetta set up a GoFundMe appeal online. After 6 months, the fundraiser exceeded its goal of \$5,000.

Once the entire team got to Pennsylvania, they toured DX Engineering, and Marty gave a presentation summarizing the group's goals. The crew was aiming to hit 11 million points by the end of the competition, but that wasn't without its challenges. This was the first time the K3LR station would be part of the CQ WW WPX SSB contest, and the group had not yet operated together as a team, nor had they operated from KL3R during a contest. Tim said, "There was a very steep learning curve for them to overcome quickly."

Before the contest began, the team got on the air to get to know each other's operating styles and practice collaborating at the superstation. "I've mostly used wire antennas all my life, so...when you have a stack of

four antennas on 20 meters and you're trying to point each one in a different direction — that was definitely a learning experience for me," Violetta described.

The plan for the contest included keeping two radios on each band, one using the strategy of "search and pounce" and the other calling CQ, with four operators on at a time. "It was pretty tense at first. As soon as the top of the hour hit, we were going rapid-fire, making contacts left and right," Violetta said. While all contacts were made entirely by the team, Tim stood by to ensure the station continued working properly and that the operators had regular meals while they operated around the clock. K3LR's longtime friend Tim Jellison, W3YQ, also stepped in for coaching shifts to give Duffy the chance to cook and sleep.

Throughout the weekend, each team member had the opportunity to use their unique operating abilities. Marty's skill in high-rate operation put him on the Saturday morning

20-meter run. Levi had experience reaching Japanese hams due to his living in southern California, which proved useful in making JA contacts on 20 meters. Tomi's fluency in several European languages was also a benefit in making international contacts. He expertly kept a clear frequency on 40 meters where many stations are close together, allowing Violetta to cut through pileups with her stand-out female voice and use her experience contacting DX stations during daytime operation.

Top-Tier Results

Despite having never worked as a team before, Team Exuberance achieved 6,008 contacts, the majority of which were across 40 and 20 meters, and 1,428 prefixes, about 50% of which were in North America. In total, the group accumulated 23,796,192 points, more than doubling their goal. According to the raw results, K3LR was the top station in

North America, and placed fourth in its category worldwide.

"Contesting isn't easy — one doesn't just do it, and it doesn't happen magically. We had to work hard to optimize our efforts in real time," Marty said. Since the contest, Marty has continued giving presentations on Team Exuberance's work at various companies, radio clubs, and organizations, including at Dayton Hamvention®, hosting the 2019 ARRL Convention, in Xenia, Ohio.

The team has expressed incredible gratitude to every club, individual, and mentor who contributed to making their operation happen, and a special thanks to Tim Duffy. "Tim, K3LR, was an incredible host and it was his top priority to keep us feeling good," David said. "Without him, we would all still be at home, dreaming."

While this was the first time an all-youth team competed from K3LR, Tim hopes it won't be the last. "I believe that it is important that large and small station owners [and] contesters all

over the planet become involved and offer their help, mentoring, and assistance to youth," he said in an interview with college-age ham Ruth Willet, KM4LAO, featured on the K3LR station website.

In fact, Violetta said she has already had other young hams ask to be involved if a similar event happens again. However, what the team would really like to see is the formation of more youth teams competing with older mentors, carving out a

place for a young community in Amateur Radio. To stay up to date with what else Team Exuberance might have in store, visit www.teamexuberance.org.

All photos courtesy of Marty Sullaway, NN1C.

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▲ Bryant, KG5HVO (left), and David, VE7DZO, under the mentoring of Tim, K3LR (center).

◀ The group was given an antenna tour at the K3LR superstation when they arrived in Pennsylvania.

