



## Second Century

# Public Service in All Its Forms — The Spirit of Amateur Radio

*“The theme of this month’s issue of QST is ‘public service,’ a topic that likely means different things to different ham radio operators. Some view public service as strictly emergency communications, being prepared to step in when the communications infrastructure has been damaged and is inoperable. This could be the result of a natural or manmade disaster. Either way, it is one of the most important forms of public service. Providing that critical communications link for our served agencies and local emergency management organizations is an important reason and is part of the basis and purpose of the Amateur Radio Service.”*

But these types of emergencies are, hopefully, not frequent in most areas of the country. There are other types of public service that need the particular skills of the ham radio community. Marathons, bike-a-thons, charity walks, or for that matter, any large public gathering. These “planned incidents” provide the ham radio operator the opportunity to contribute their skills to the community and provide a valuable service.

There are thousands of amateurs who spend their personal time training to provide communications services for any and all of these incidents, planned or unplanned. They are members of ARRL’s Amateur Radio Emergency Service® (ARES®). ARES is organized, generally, along state and local boundaries within the ARRL Field Organization and has a long-storied history within the organization. On page 68 of this issue, you will read about the proposed strategic plan for ARES as well as the implementation of the new *ARES Connect* volunteer management software. The strategic plan is being revised to ensure that the ARES program continues to meet the current needs of our served agencies and is in alignment with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS). It is an important step for this critical program, and I recommend reading this article for anyone interested in participating in ARES.

Whatever your definition of public service may be, it is one of the most cited reasons for new licensees these days, particularly Technician-class licensees, when asked why they want to get their license and join the Amateur Radio Service. This should present a great opportunity to welcome the new licensees to your local club or ARES organization and help teach them the basic skills necessary for participating in public service communications.

Given the current privileges of the Technician-class license, it will allow them to come up to speed on the operations of repeaters and several other modes of operation. It will also provide them the opportunity to meet local hams both on and off the air, which is an important part of getting them active, which we have seen is absolutely key to integrating the new operators into the hobby. This is something everyone can do. It’s like the old saying, “all politics is local.” As I see it, all amateur activity begins at the local level.

Before I close this month’s column, I would also like to point out that the public service performed by Amateur Radio operators is not always about only radio communications. In many circumstances, the skills of Amateur Radio operators to deal with the complexities of electronics and how things go together, even systems that the hams are not required to operate as part of their deployment, become important in their public service. In some cases, as in the situation faced by the volunteers sent to Puerto Rico last fall, they performed additional tasks such as the distribution of supplies throughout the affected areas across the island. One of the volunteers, Andy Anderson, KE0AYJ, even helped set up a helicopter landing pad at Guajataca Dam. The lengths amateurs will go to provide public service know no bounds.

The important thing to note is that Amateur Radio operators can provide public service in many different forms, all beginning with their radio skills, but branching out in many different ways. These are just examples of the spirit of Amateur Radio and, if we all work to integrate the new licensees into the hobby, will be for the foreseeable future.

*Barry J. Shelley, N1VXY*