

PVRC — Focused on the Future

The Potomac Valley Radio Club (PVRC) has a long history since its founding in 1947 by a group of local contesters that included Vic Clark, W4KFC (SK), and Lenny Chertok, W3GRF (SK). Originally based in the Washington, DC, area, PVRC two decades ago expanded from a local to a regional club and widened its circle, in part to more effectively compete in the ARRL November Sweepstakes — a focus that continues to this day. We have maintained our original motto of “Once a Member, Always a Member” and have recently emphasized encouraging little pistols and facilitating interaction across our chapters.

Background and Regional Structure

As PVRC became a regional club, we discovered one challenge was the physical distance between members, given the larger DX contest circles of 175 miles for ARRL contests and 250 miles for CQ World Wide events. Operators were submitting club scores from Delaware to West Virginia, from Pennsylvania to North Carolina, who had never met in person (see Figure 1). How to foster unity and camaraderie across the club? The answer has evolved to be both local and regional.

We now have 16 chapters ranging from Maryland and Virginia to North Carolina. Local chapters typically meet monthly, sometimes at the same location and an hour before or after a local ham club’s monthly meeting. Occasionally we receive new membership inquiries this way. We have found the chapter system allows a large club the size of PVRC to maintain a personal touch at the local level. This engages friendships and face-to-face contact among members with local expertise, while leveraging the central resources of the entire club.

At the same time, our annual event calendar has evolved to host several regional events designed to bring members from nearby chapters together. These include the W3LPL Open House every June, the DC Metro region’s Fowl Fest, the Pig Fest at NR4M’s Goat Farm in the fall, and the PVRC Galactic Lunch in February at Frostfest in Richmond, Virginia. Many PVRC members have made their first eyeball QSOs at these regional gatherings. Between major events, our club officers hold periodic conference calls to brainstorm ideas and develop strategy.

No Annual Dues

PVRC discarded its dues requirement

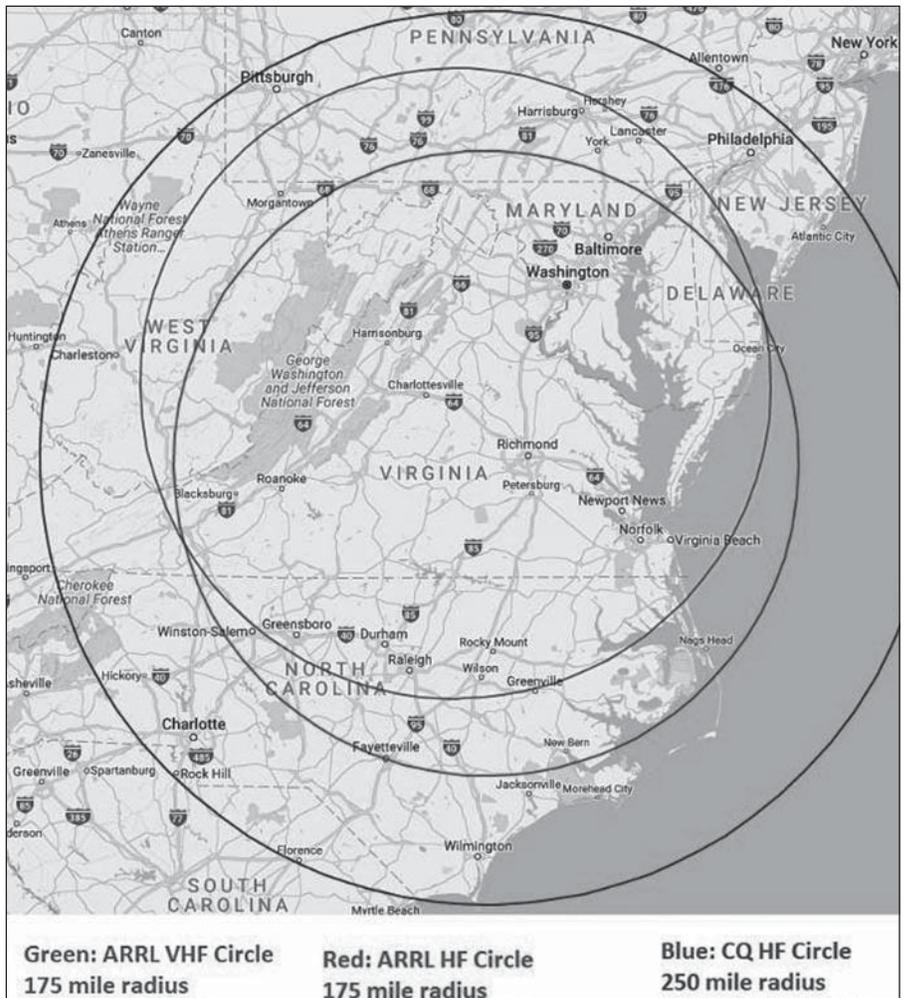


Figure 1 — A chart of the PVRC circles for ARRL VHF, ARRL HF, and CQ HF events.

40 years ago. Every monthly *PVRC Newsletter* contains a message that reads, “We depend on the generosity of all our club members to finance our annual budget. In addition, active PVRC members are expected to participate and submit logs for at least two PVRC club competition contests per year.” This no-dues approach has proved effective on many levels. For example, contesters who might spend a few years focused on family, work, or school with little time for contesting know they can always come back to PVRC and not worry about having to be voted into membership again or falling behind on dues.

The lack of mandatory dues has not been a problem for our finances. Our annual budget is quite low, consisting mostly

of sponsored contest plaques, our awards programs, pizza for Dayton’s Contest Suite, and small administrative expenses. In the past, whenever our treasury has run low, we have put out a call for donations on our email reflector, and members have stepped up to donate. We’ve only had to do this a couple of times since I joined the club in 2010.

PVRC is structured as an IRS 501(c)(7) Social Club, and donations are *not* tax deductible. After a structural review in 2014, we felt our activities no longer fulfilled the Public Education requirement for IRS 501(c)(3) status, as the former PVRC webinar series is now administered by the World Wide Radio Operators’ Federation (WWROF), and the original PVRC-spon-

sored Contest University (CTU) series is now regularly hosted at Dayton.

Club Awards and Little Pistol Initiatives

Our main award program is the 5 million or 5M Award, originally kicked off in 1997. The eligible 5M contests each year are on our website, www.pvrc.org/5M/season_contests.php. For most 5M-eligible event, the winning PVRC in-circle score receives 1 million points and serves as the reference score for that event, with all other PVRC members receiving proportional points based on their own scores. Points continue to accrue over the years.

PVRC presents members with plaques when they accrue 5 million points. In response to interest from our members, our 5M program was recently supplemented with lower-threshold awards from 1 to 4 million points, providing steady checkpoints for smaller stations to be recognized on their way to 5 million points. Once above 5 million, additional milestones are recog-

nized with endorsements in 5, 10, and 25 million increments. Multioperator station hosts earn points, even if they do not operate; if they do operate, they receive double credit. In this way, members are incentivized to host new operators at their stations and increase their total score contributions to the club.

In addition to 5M, in 2017 we introduced our PVRC Olympics program, where members can earn medals each year by satisfying requirements beyond simply posting contest scores. Activities are scavenger-hunt style and include writing an article for the monthly newsletter, entering a RTTY or VHF contest, attending meetings in person, even contributing to the club treasury. We added Making 200 QSOs in Sweepstakes as a PVRC Olympics qualifier event, to help continue our winning streak. In this way, we reward each member's total contribution to the club.

Several other incentives, such as our Top Gun Award, help motivate members on Sunday afternoons of Sweepstakes (see Figure 2). We also have a tradition of Presidents Leadership Awards, where the PVRC president recognizes outstanding efforts for the benefit of the club. Recipients include members who have built and main-

tained multioperator stations, mentored young contesters, started new chapters, and served in key officer roles.

Focus Contests

PVRC is perhaps most well-known for strong finishes in Sweepstakes, dating back to the club's earliest days. We post our contest wins in school gym banner style on our website, [http://pvrc.org/PVRC Championship Banners.pdf](http://pvrc.org/PVRC_Championship_Banners.pdf). In particular, 2017 was a banner year for PVRC, as we took home gavels in CQ WPX, ARRL 160, RTTY Roundup, ARRL 10 Meter, CQ WPX RTTY, and CQ 160.

A long time ago, PVRC was a powerhouse in CQ World Wide DX, with wins every year from 1960 to 1976 (except for 1971) and equally strong in the ARRL International DX Contest (10 club wins between 1957 and 1977). Maybe one year we will return to focus on those Big Four DX contests as a club, but we would need carefully planned local and DXpedition efforts to overcome the many good operators and European propagation advantages that other clubs enjoy.

Recently, we have increased our focus on the NAQP Challenge Cup, a friendly competition between NCCC, SMC, and



Figure 2 — The success of the PVRC in ARRL November Sweepstakes Club Competition.

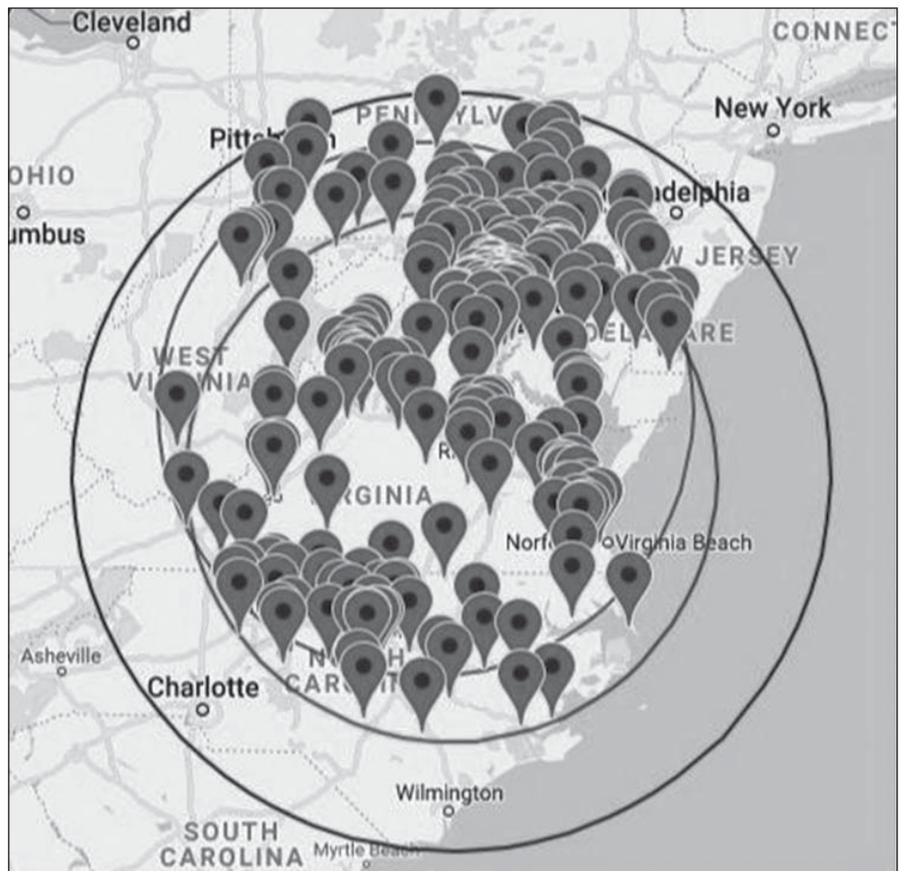


Figure 3 — This map is populated by searching contest results for non-member call signs within our circles.

PVRC which runs as an overlay to the six NAQP events each year. We thought the NAQP would be a good fit with our large number of little pistol stations. The NAQP Challenge Cup has been a great success with NCCC, SMC, and PVRC all winning the cup at least once since 2013. We have tweaked the Challenge rules over the years in consultation with the other clubs to maintain fairness of scoring and create a level playing field. The NAQP Challenge incorporates two scoring innovations — a Participation Multiplier and an Irish Points scoring system. This has tended to keep the winner in doubt until the last of the six NAQPs. For more information see naqpc.org.

Other Innovations

Other non-operating innovations have included a tri-fold PVRC paper brochure and a Google Maps utility showing prospective members, located at pvrc.org/prospective-members.html (see Figure 3). Clicking on a potential member's icon alerts nearby PVRC members to reach out and invite them to a local chapter meeting. Over time, we hope this will lead to a steady stream of new contesters recruited from other aspects of Amateur Radio.

In 2018 we experimented with a PVRC Chapter Showdown for Sweepstakes. This was an internal chapter-vs-chapter competition across the two Sweepstakes weekends to encourage participation. If member feedback is positive, we'll continue it next year.

We were late to social media but finally added a PVRC Facebook page in 2016. The majority of communication, though, is done via our closed email reflector which is monitored but not actively moderated, and we rely on the judgement of our members to post appropriate content. We also encourage PVRC-branded merchandise including windbreakers, shirts, and QSL cards, and we publish a monthly newsletter with content provided by members.

Membership Trends

How is all of this working? If we count the number of PVRC members submitting at least two scores across the 29 annual events eligible for the 5M Award, we see a positive trend (see Figure 4). Two points from this chart are worthy of highlighting. First, if we define an Active Member as one who submits at least two scores eligible for 5M in one year (middle trace), that total has steadily increased from 200 in 2009 to more than 260 in 2018. Using that metric, we can say PVRC is healthy and growing. By contrast, the trace showing members submitting only one 5M-eligible score in a given year (bottom trace) has fluctuated between 50 and 100. We have found a given member may jump between

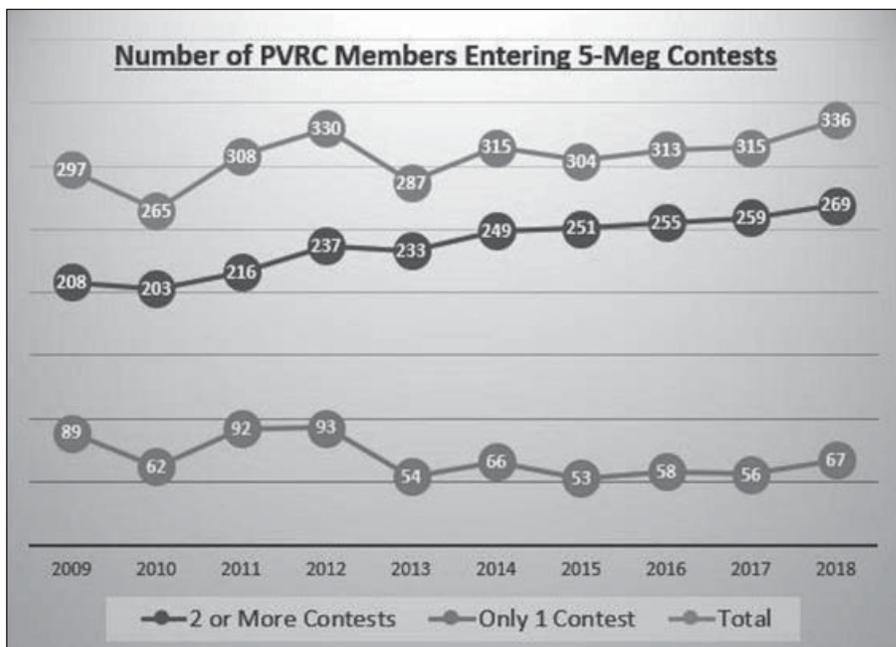


Figure 4 — The increase in the number of PVRC members entering two 5M-eligible contests.

both traces over time, supported by our member-for-life and no-dues policies. It would be interesting to compare those figures against other large contest clubs that charge dues and maintain a more formal active membership definition.

It's noteworthy that by design, 13 of our 29 5M-eligible contests do not have a club circle limitation. This includes the NAQPs, WAE, Russian DX, and CQ 160. Those events allow PVRC members located anywhere in the world to have their scores counted for 5M credit. For example, if WJ9B in Idaho (a PVRC member for life, since Will used to live within the circle before moving west), contributes two NAQP CW scores to PVRC, his scores count toward 5M and are included in the chart under two or more.

The Next Generation

We continue to struggle to recruit younger contesters, a topic that could be the topic of a separate article. Most often, we encourage young ops via technical assistance in station building, inclusion in multioperator teams, and the occasional equipment donation. Recently, a PVRC member in Northwest Chapter (Maryland) donated an FT-1000MP to 16-year old Connor, W4IPC, of our Tidewater Chapter (Virginia), after a review of many qualified young candidates put forward by PVRC members. Two-time WRTC competitor Nate, N4YDU, is a notable PVRC young operator success story, and he has recently been mentoring Tucker, W4FS, at

his home station. Already, Tucker has been turning in impressive scores, including 2.4 million points in the 2017 CQ WW CW using a remote station. In the August 2019 NAQP CW, 12-year old Charles, AA4LS, from North Carolina scored more than 100,000 points using SO2R.

Conclusion

Overall, we can say these factors have been helpful in strengthening our club:

- ◆ An awareness that the majority of our members do not own superstations.
- ◆ A local approach via our chapter system.
- ◆ A calendar of regional events every few months to bring people together.
- ◆ Voluntary contributions as opposed to required dues.
- ◆ Recognition for participation beyond contest scores.
- ◆ Identifying focus contests to concentrate cheerleading where we are strongest.
- ◆ Frequent off-the-air communication.

Additional information is available on our website, www.pvrc.org. Perhaps you will find something there of use to your own club. We are eager to hear what approaches other clubs use to expand their memberships for the benefit of radiosport.

About the Author: Ken Low, KE3X, is a past president and former trustee of PVRC, a two-time WRTC team leader and two-time High Speed Telegraphy competitor. He lives in Washington, DC, with his wife Ann and their four boys.