

Team Exuberance - The K3LR All-Youth Team Competing In The 2019 CQ WW WPX SSB Contest

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The CQ WW WPX SSB contest, occurring March 30-31st, 2019, is sure to be noteworthy to follow and participate in. This annual contest is very popular among hams, allowing operators from around the world to refine and use their contesting skills as they work to achieve top honors in an assortment of different categories. The opportunities are exciting and as a result, many seasoned contest stations make this an annual scheduled event for a top-notch team.

K3LR, in Pennsylvania, is a superstation that is active in many contests, and yes, Tim Duffy, its owner, is hosting an amazing team this year. But this team has an awesome twist to its composition. Not only is this year the first time that K3LR will participate in CQ WW WPX SSB, but this is also the first time there has been a team of only youth ham radio operators! Each of these fine operators, all under the age of 21, are quickly becoming household names in the world of contesting. Dubbed "Team Exuberance," they are determined to use their youthful energy and love for the hobby to give the other competitors in Multi-Two a run for their money.

The international team members include six operators: Violetta, KM4ATT; Marty, NN1C (ex-KC1CWF); Bryant, KG5HVO; David, VE7DZO; Tomi, HA8RT; and Levi, K6JO.

Violetta and David were participants in the 2018 Dave Kalter Memorial Youth DX Adventure to Curacao. As a result of that weeklong adventure of radio operating, exploration, team work and international friendships, a desire to form a youth contesting team was sparked. Upon her return to the states, Violetta, who had previously operated at K3LR, shared her idea with Tim Duffy. He eagerly jumped on the idea and offered his support and his station.

Tim is approaching this contest as an excellent way to mentor youth through the use of his station. "While we have had individual youth at K3LR, this is the first full youth team we have hosted. Each youth operator will have one parent on the trip with them. I, along with one or two other members of my team, will be here to advise and coach, but we will not make any contacts. We will teach, encourage, and steer the ship so to speak, but the idea is that the kids will make all of the QSOs during the contest."

As noted by Bryant, "It is really exciting that the initiative has begun for an all youth contest team. I don't think it has really been done in the U.S. Our biggest challenge is that the entire team has never operated as a full team before this contest." Violetta and Marty are taking on the roles of team leaders. All of the youth contesters have been selected for the individual contributions they will be bringing to the team effort.

Above all else, Tim wants this to be a learning opportunity for the team. “Our number one goal is to have fun. This is passing the torch. Contesting has been a lot of fun to me for a lot of years and I want to share that. Our second goal is to learn something. Being a good contest operator sharpens a lot of skills that are good in life - how to interact with people, how to understand people with various accents, how to work with people to get certain information, and how to work together as a team. The focus on the team. It’s not just all about you and how fast you can run, but are you doing things that benefit the team. So emphasizing teamwork is important for a successful contest.”

Marty, NN1C, notes, “K3LR is planning to operate in the Multi-Two category. This means that there are multiple operators but only two transmitters. We will use four radios at a given time. The idea is that there is a stack of antennas for each operator. One operator is running while the other is interweaving QSOs search and pounce. As a result, we have four stations to be manned for the 48 hour contest. Each team member has different skills to be used, and hopefully all the hard work pays off.”

The team hopes that this will be the start of many future all youth contest teams. Marty is passionate about this, “It is important to us that this is not a one-shot deal. If this works out, we want to continue doing these from multiple stations. There have been very successful programs in IARU Region One; what YOTA is doing. We really want to bring that to the U.S. in a big way. This team is the trial run and not the last. It can only exist with more people like Tim Duffy who are willing to open their stations to youth. There is demonstrated interest and we certainly hope to keep going.”

Tim also stresses the importance of older hams mentoring youth: “I believe it is important that large and small station owners, contesters all over the planet, become involved and offer their help, mentoring, and assistance to youth. That happened to me. There were guys when I was a teenager that did that to me and said, “Sure, come and operate with us.” I think along the way we didn’t focus on it as much as we should. So I am very hopeful that others will do this. We want to continue on that effort. This is just as important as other things in amateur radio; to really focus on the youth and give back in this way.”

“Team Exuberance” is a top notch team and has high expectations and goals, “We would like to win Multi-Two,” Violetta said. “Our team will have hard competition, but we will do our best. This is the first time that the K3LR callsign has been entered specifically in CQ WPX SSB, so we want to live up to his good reputation from numerous contests.”

With the high quality of youth operators on the team, I am sure that this team will excel and deserves the support of all the amateur radio community as they exuberantly compete in the 2019 CQ WW WPX SSB Contest!