

## NCJ Club Spotlight: The Arizona Outlaws Contest Club

### Gunslingers Unite: The Formation of the Arizona Outlaws Contest Club

Strange things can happen in the deserts of Arizona. Under the saguaro cacti and among the rattlesnakes, the coyotes, the Gila monsters and the scorpions, radiosport enthusiasts of many backgrounds form nearly inexplicable alliances. Conspiratorial-like bonds are established, uncharacteristic of individualistic Arizonans, and allow the efforts of these individuals to be combined for powerful results. Such is the story of the ham radio contest “gunslingers” who joined up to form the Arizona Outlaws Contest Club in June 2009.

When I arrived in the Phoenix area in the late summer of 2002, my first close friend was Mike Fulcher, KC7V. Mike is the cream of the crop as far as Arizona contesters go and truly a good guy. Plus, he was one of the founders of the famed Voodoo Contest Group, noted for its very successful annual CQ World Wide DX CW treks to West Africa.

Mike and I began regular weekly lunch outings in 2003. He was active in the Central Arizona DX Association (CADXA). I also joined the CADXA, taking as contest coordinator in late 2003. The CADXA was an established, Phoenix-based DX club with a proud tradition and a core of active contesters.

Our lunch outings soon included contesters John “Weenie Pistol” Arthurs, K7WP, and Gary “Mister QRP Contester” Hembree, N7IR. This was a good gunslinger bunch, and I looked forward to their company every week. Conversations were the usual thing: Contesting, equipment and antennas for the most part. I learned something from all of them. Other local contesters as well as contesters visiting the area dropped in from time to time. In fact, anyone who could spell “contest” was welcome.

By 2005-2006, the CADXA was again becoming a contest force. There was a core of about 40 folks in CADXA that contested regularly (maybe 25 of them seriously), and the club contributed some very good scores in the major DX contests. But some things were lacking: 1) the ability to compete as a club in domestic as well as DX contests, 2) the ability to attract the intense “contester only” types, and 3) the ability to attract a membership from outside



**Figure 2 — Sandy, N7RQ, was actively involved in the formation of AOCC and serves as the club's secretary/treasurer/webmistress**

the Phoenix area that included serious contesters.

Since the CADXA was mainly a DX club and with contesting second or third place down the interest list, contesting could never be emphasized at the level I, and others, wanted. By agreement with the original officers in 2003, I promoted only DX-related contests. After all, it was a DX club with a long and proud tradition, and I understood this direction. But, to me, and many other contesters in CADXA, contesting was first, while DXing weighed in somewhere down the list. We were getting restless for more!

Discussions at lunch for a separate contest organization had begun as early as 2006 and sporadically came up again during our lunches and other discussions

for three years. Finally, in May 2009, it was time to split off the contest core, develop the framework, solicit members around the state and see if we had the makings of a focused contest club.

As principals of the new club, Mike, John and I decided to push this idea. My wife and contesteer Sandy, N7RQ, and my good friend Dave Gilbert, AB7E, were also heavily involved and recruited into the group at gunpoint (just kidding!). These individuals became instrumental in the success of the new club, and the five “gunslingers” took charge.

After about 50 e-mails among members of the group, many in-person meetings and discussions with ARRL officials, we chose a name was chosen and were off to the first real steps: Announcing the club's formation and soliciting members. The Arizona Outlaws Contest Club was now a reality. Sandy, N7RQ — a graphic artist before taking her Outlaw vows — developed a unique club logo that depicts actual Arizona outlaws from the Wild West.

The club's first officers were selected: Bob Epstein, K8IA, president; Dave Gilbert, AB7E, regional VP south; Mike Fulcher, KC7V, regional VP central; Dick Zalewski, W7ZR, regional VP north; Sandy Farley, N7RQ, secretary/treasurer/webmistress, and John Arthurs, K7WP, PR and awards.

Over lunch the following day, a straw vote was taken among Mike, John and me regarding how many contesters we thought would eventually come aboard. None of us thought we'd get more than 50 members, and my estimate of 35 to 40 members max made me the most pessimistic of the bunch.

On June 5, 2009, at 3:20 AM MST, I issued the e-mail: “Invitation to Join the Arizona Outlaws Contest Club.” It went to all the known contesters as well as to anyone in Arizona who had recently submitted a contest log for just about anything. Beyond the original five, our first member was N7AZ, who signed on about four minutes later. Rounding out the initial 10 were KN5H, N7IR, W8TK, W7SW, KS5A, K5RR, W6XI, N5IA, and N7DD. There definitely are some serious contesters in that group, folks!

Within 12 hours of our announcement, we had a roster of 42 members — a virtual “Who's Who” of Arizona Contesting. The

next 12 hours brought yet another curious bunch that included, among others, well-known contesters such as K6LL, KE2VB/ex-WP2Z, W7WW, N6VR, KY7M, N7CW, KO7AA/WB0O, NA2U, and N2IC.

N2IC? Now why would Steve London in New Mexico — one of the best contesters anywhere — be interested in joining a new contest club in another state? I'm still not fully sure what he gets out of hanging around us lesser contest mortals, but he has been one of the most helpful and knowledgeable members any club could have. He is willing to answer questions from newbies and experienced members alike. What a great Outlaw!

By the end of June our membership totaled more than 80. Earlier that month, we established a club e-mail reflector to facilitate dissemination of club info. Our full membership roll is available on QRZ.com under our club call sign, N7AT.

Sandy then built a really cool Arizona Outlaw Contest Club Web site, [www.arizonaoutlaws.net](http://www.arizonaoutlaws.net). This became another essential way to communicate not only with members but the outside world of radiosport enthusiasts as well.

Committee heads were chosen to represent every phase of contesting, including DX contests, major domestic contests, QSO parties, VHF/UHF, and digital events. In general these members had significant experience in the chosen contest type and enough available time to thoroughly cover their assignments.

In addition several members stepped forward to fulfill the role of educating new contesters. That's an important function of any contest club and, unfortunately, one that's neglected in some. Anyone can join the Arizona Outlaws, and contest mentoring is available for the asking. About 25 percent of the club's members are contesting neophytes. We make sure they get the proper coaching, so that newbie status disappears very quickly.

The first major contest of the newly formed Arizona Outlaws Contest Club was the 2009 IARU HF World Championship. Although not a club competition event, our participation showed that we had a future. We had 27 entries and more than 5.3 million points. Two club competition multimode events followed in 2009, the CQ WW and the ARRL November Sweepstakes. Finally, it was time to see how we could



**Figure 1 — The AOCC Board and guests meet frequently to compare results and stats for recent contest submissions. L-R: Guff, KS5A; Hardy, N7RT; Mike, KC7V; Bob, K8IA, and Gary, N7IR**

do against the Old Guard.

In the combined modes of 2009 CQ WW, the Arizona Outlaws turned in 67 entries and attained a combined score of nearly 25 million points, which we considered a pretty decent showing for a new club. It was good for 14<sup>th</sup> in the US and served to show many long established contest clubs that the Outlaws had arrived.

In the 2009 Sweepstakes, the Arizona Outlaws posted a final combined score of more than 3.1 million points. That placed us fifth in the US in the medium club category, topping some really good Old Guard clubs. Here's how things shook out for that event in the medium club category:

1. Southern California Contest Club: 3,949,274
2. Frankford Radio Club: 3,819,782
3. Central Texas DX and Contest Club: 3,475,648
4. South East Contest Club: 3,296,454
5. Arizona Outlaws Contest Club: 3,110,762
6. Grand Mesa Contesters of Colorado: 2,570,978
7. Contest Club Ontario: 2,414,168
8. Western Washington DX Club: 2,106,510
9. North Texas Contest Club: 1,783,016
10. Willamette Valley DX Club: 1,215,680

Rounding out our best of 2009, the Arizona Outlaws did very well in the ARRL 10

Meter Contest too, finishing fourth in the US in our category. Here are the top five:

1. Frankford Radio Club: 1,160,678
2. Yankee Clipper Contest Club: 1,079,780
3. Central Texas DX and Contest Club: 1,055,884
4. Arizona Outlaws Contest Club: 646,514
5. Grand Mesa Contesters of Colorado: 597,892

As this article went to press, we were still awaiting final scores for the CQ WW 160, the ARRL International DX, and the CQ WW WPX to see how we fared in club competition. Here's a glimpse at the Arizona Outlaw claimed scores for these events:

- Nearly 14 million points in the 2010 ARRL International DX contests
- More than 4.1 million points in the 2010 CQ WW 160 contests
- More than 5.7 million points in the 2010 CQ WPX SSB contest
- More than 4.7 million points claimed in the 2010 CQ WPX CW contest

The Arizona Outlaws Contest Club is looking forward to the 2010–2011 contest season to improve further. We welcome any radio amateur with an interest in contesting — from cap gun to big gun — to join us. See [www.arizonaoutlaws.net/joinus.html](http://www.arizonaoutlaws.net/joinus.html).

**NCJ**