



Editorial

“The Sky is Falling!” (II)

Look at these New Member stats for RMS; the decline they show is typical of what at least most of the clubs in the hobby have been experiencing for the last 20 years.

RMS New Members:

That’s a pretty steady, and certainly significant, decline. That mirrors what’s been happening in the hobby. Fewer people are coming in as new collectors...and that’s not even taking into account what percentage of the new people drop out after the first year or two. And, incidentally, I don’t think it’s a coincidence that this decline parallels almost perfectly the collapse of the domestic match industry and the rise of the anti-smoking campaign.

Fewer collectors means...*even* fewer people to trade with, fewer workers, fewer donations to club activities, fewer buyers and sellers in auctions, fewer people at conventions, fewer people at club meetings, fewer people to turn to for help and information, fewer displays, fewer people to contribute to bulletins, and less operating capital for clubs, swapfests, and conventions.

As an example, sure enough, just look at how convention attendance has also been steadily declining for both RMS and AMCAL [see Part I, last month, for the actual stats]. That’s one of the biggest shames of all, because it takes a lot of planning and effort to put these get-togethers on, and the appropriate workers really knock

themselves out, and then to see fewer and fewer people show up each year...well, it’s a shame. ...And the “fewer workers” is particularly scary, because its the workers who keep the clubs, conventions, swapfests, etc. going. It doesn’t matter how many members a club might have, when it runs out of volunteers to do the work—the club folds. History is rife with examples. And, it’s also those hobby activists that start new clubs.

Pretty depressing, all in all, if, as I mentioned in the first segment, one is only considering growth. There are other perspectives, however.

As a case in point, I keep harping on the fact that the hobby is shrinking in numbers so rapidly, but you could make a good argument that, in these ‘trying’ times, the hobby is shrinking down to the *real* collectors, with most of the others (fringe collectors, social collectors, etc.) falling by the wayside). How many really ‘active,’ ‘aggressive’ collectors did we actually have in the hobby even at our high point in the early 1980s?...Nowhere near the number of known collectors. I currently show 1,936 people in the *entire* hobby [that’s as close a count as anyone can get]. How many of those do you know at least by name? ...Right!...That’s because most are ‘quiet’ collectors rather than activists. When you think about it, this has always been a small hobby (despite our own hype). So, one *could* look at all this as simply a return to a more realistic situation after a period of ‘bloating’ by the ‘window shoppers’ of the 1980s’. [Does that make you feel better about everything? It doesn’t for me!]

By the way, this decline in collectors also explains why the same people keep winning all the awards in the hobby—just look at the convention display winners, for example, for, say, the last five years—it’s the same names over and over again. It’s not their *fault*, of course. They’re participating. The problem is...no one else is!

[Ed. note: The fact that I came into the hobby in 1983 and everything started going downhill from then on is purely coincidental!...I think!]

1983	375
-	321
1984	326
-	247
1985	200
-	219
1986	150
-	244
1987	126
-	188
1988	167
-	147
1989	74
-	65
1990	127
-	93
1991	74
-	69
1992	61
-	59