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CONTACT: Mark Abramowicz, NT3V, YHOTY Chairman, Amateur Radio Newsline, (newsline@arnewsline.org)

Rich Moseson, W2VU, CQ Magazine, (w2vu@cq-amateur-radio.com)

Dhruv Rebba KC9ZJX is 2019 Young Ham of the Year

Dhruv Rebba, KC9ZJX, operates PJ2Y from Curacao Island during the 2018 Dave Kalter Youth DX Adventure. (Photo provided by KC9ZJX)
NEW YORK – Dhruv Rebba KC9ZJX of Normal, IL, has been selected as the 2019 Bill Pasternak WA6ITF Memorial Amateur Radio Newsline Young Ham of the Year.

Dhruv, 15, is the son of Hari Rebba VU2SPZ and Shailaja Panyam.

He is entering his sophomore year at the Normal Community High School this fall.

He is a member of the Central Illinois Radio Club.

Dhruv earned his Technician Class license in 2013 when he was only 9 years old. He followed it up by passing the test for a General Class license a year later...

Dhruv says his interest in amateur radio was sparked by a 2013 visit to the Dayton Hamvention with his father, a long-time amateur radio operator from India who settled in the U.S.

“He was going to the Hamvention and so I wanted to tag along,” Dhruv recalls. “There I got to see all the cool stuff like the Morse-Code keyers and all the radios and everything and I decided to start studying for my Technician class.”

After getting his license, Dhruv became involved in Field Days and public service events with the Central Illinois Radio Club, including the “We Care Twin Cities Marathon” and the “Hop on for Hope Bike Ride/Walk.”

Dhruv says he found a way to combine his interest in space and engineering with his new hobby. He joined AMSAT (Radio Amateur Satellite Corporation) and pursued his dream of a school contact with an astronaut aboard the International Space Station.
In October 2017, he served as the lead control operator for an Amateur Radio on the International Space Station (ARISS) contact with students at his school – the Chiddix Junior High School in Normal, IL - with astronaut Joe Acaba KE5DAR.

In late July of this year, Dhruv helped to facilitate another ARISS contact with international Scouts attending the World Jamboree in West Virginia and monitored the contact from his home.

ARISS presentations at Dayton and Huntsville, his selection as an ARISS mentor and networking with those putting together the ARISS contact for the World Jamboree led to his role in the July 2019 contact.

In 2018, Dhruv was selected for the Dave Kalter Memorial Youth DX Adventure. He traveled to Curacao Island in July 2018 where the PJ2Y team made a record 6,262 contacts with 135 countries over five days. Dhruv says he enjoyed operating his favorite mode, SSB.

Dhruv has earned many accolades for his amateur radio pursuits including the “Young Ham Lends A Hand" award at the 2019 Dayton Hamvention Youth Forum; “Presidential Award” from AMSAT; and the “Young Achievers Award” from the Radio Club of America.

He also has traveled to India to promote amateur radio awareness and spoke at the ZPH School, NP Kunta, India in January 2018. He discussed the importance of wireless communications and their role during disasters.

Dhruv started the “Universal Help Foundation” to help underprivileged students on a global scale. Among his first projects was a digital project at a girls’ high school in NP Kunta, India this past January.

Dhruv also has an interest in robotics and has worked as a mentor helping elementary school students build robots. This past April, Dhruv’s “MetalCow Robotics” team finished fourth overall in the international competition sponsored by NASA in Detroit.

Dhruv says a visit to the AMSAT booth at the 2019 Dayton Hamvention prompted him to sign on for the “Amateur Radio Exploration on the Moon” project.

“We’re designing an amateur radio system to be on the Gateway Space Station and the Moon,” he says.
Dhruv will be recognized during the Huntsville Hamfest on Aug. 17 in the Von Braun Center, Huntsville AL.

The Young Ham of the Year was inaugurated by William Pasternak, WA6ITF, in 1986. Upon his passing in 2015, Bill’s name was added to the award as a memorial to his commitment to recognizing the accomplishments of young people to the amateur radio service.

Amateur Radio Newsline, CQ Magazine and Yaesu USA are primary sponsors of the award, along with Heil Sound Ltd. and Radiowavz Antenna Company.