Puerto Rico State Convention

January 26-27, 2013

Trip Report

http://www.arrlpr.org/

Although Larry Price W4RA says that there has been a hamfest in Puerto Rico before this one which had an ARRL booth, this event appears to have been the first ARRL convention in KP4. It was organized by the Puerto Rico Amateur Radio League and the Caribbean Amateur Radio Group, in consultation with Director Sarratt. It was held at the Coliseo de Hatillo in Hatillo, PR. The town is located on the coast, about an hour and 15 minutes west of San Juan on the major east-west highway across the northern side of the island.

The forums were on Saturday. Topics were power poles, HSMM Mesh (by the SM of the USVI Section), DXpeditions and contests (by Ramón Santoyo XE1KK, Secretary of IARU Region 2), and communications for road races. Concluding the program was a virtual presentation by Gordon West.

The attendance was larger on Sunday, apparently because many people have to work on Saturday. Many conventions are thinning out by early afternoon, but this one lasted until the announced closing time on both days. The door prize array was impressive, thanks in part to donations from manufacturers and the ARRL.

The ARRL booth had a great deal of traffic. I don’t have the figures on membership sign-ups but we were busy. We had signs in Spanish promoting membership, and the application forms were in English on one side and Spanish on the other. We also had a recruitment brochure in Spanish and left a number of copies with the Section Manager.

Bob Inderbitzen NQ1R, Director Sarratt, and I were at the booth throughout. Section Manager Rene Fonseca NP3O was with us from time to time. He and his Section Staff were dressed in the black ARRL polo shirts that Bob, Greg, and I wore.

In addition to the convention *per se*, other events allowed us to meet members informally. On Friday afternoon, we were part of a group of guests given a (so to speak) backstage tour of the Arecibo observatory. Unlike typical visitors, we were taken into the control room areas. We were to have been allowed to walk under the enormous dish, but there had been too much rain and it was unsafe to go there.

On Friday evening, a reception for the ARRL visitors was held at a restaurant. There were welcoming remarks by the convention organizers, followed by remarks from the ARRL guests. I took a deep breath and made my remarks in Spanish. Since nobody either laughed out loud or scowled and left the room, I guess I did okay. Quite a number of people, in fact, complimented me on my accent and delivery. This is not intended as self-aggrandizement. I did it to show respect for the local culture, and apparently it was taken and appreciated in that spirit.

On Saturday, the ARRL guests were invited to visit the license test session at the convention. Former Section Manager Victor Madera KP4PQ, the grand old man of Amateur Radio in Puerto Rico, has done huge good work to restore integrity to license testing there. He has translated examinations and exam prep material into Spanish and developed impressive software for generating necessary forms. Successful candidates get an attractive half-page card promoting ARRL membership and license upgrading. He’s a remarkable person, and we are fortunate to have someone of his stature working with ARRL/VEC and promoting the ARRL in Puerto Rico.

On Saturday night, Angelo Saavedra KP4EU invited a large number of people to his place for a “coquí festival.” The coquí is a tiny frog that is a symbol of Puerto Rico. The event was a cookout (no frogs on the menu!) with a great deal of food, drink, music, and conversation. Visitors from Mexico and Argentina and ARRL officials were recognized.

On Sunday morning, the Puerto Rico Amateur Radio League held their annual meeting at a facility about ten minutes from the convention site. Director Sarratt and I were invited to attend and say a few words. I trotted out my Spanish again. Having learned that Victor Madera became licensed the year I was born, I made a little joke about our being brother and sister and followed on to say that through Amateur Radio we have family in every country of the world.

A nice touch by the organizers was to call all the attending club presidents – at least a dozen people – up on the stage to make comments during the closing ceremony.

Both the convention organizers and the Amateurs who attended the convention genuinely appreciated the respect shown to them by the League’s support of the convention. The organizers have a dream of making this convention into the Dayton of the Caribbean, because there are inexpensive air fares to Puerto Rico from many countries both in the islands and on the Central and nearby South American mainlands. With a balance of ambition and realism, this might come about someday.

The reported attendance was 1,112 over the two-day period. A follow-up phone conversation with the convention chairman indicates that he is well aware that this initial success should not be taken as grounds to go hog-wild next time around and attempt more than can reasonably be accomplished.

The only equipment manufacturer exhibiting at the convention was Yaesu. They told me that they had a good show and were glad they came. Yaesu was tagged as the event’s “platinum sponsor.” I understand that this greatly irritated ICOM. I also understand that before Yaesu was approached, ICOM was asked to be a sponsor but declined. There were ICOM rigs among the door prizes. If you should hear any negative comments from ICOM about the role of Yaesu at the Puerto Rico convention, this is information you may find handy to know.

I appreciate Director Sarratt’s approval of my visit to this event. Eighty degree weather in January is good. That plus meeting a group of enthusiastic ARRL members is even better.

Respectfully submitted,

Kay Craigie N3KN