PUERTO RICO STATE CONVENTION

JANUARY 25-26, 2014

HATILLO, PR

TRIP REPORT

The second Puerto Rico State Convention built on the success of the 2013 event [see my report attached to ODV:21488, January 31, 2013]. It was held at the same location, a community sports activity center’s basketball arena. The center is made available by the town of Hatillo at no charge to the sponsors, allowing them to avoid an entrance fee for attendees.

Hatillo is located on the northern coast of Puerto Rico, about an hour and 15 minutes west of San Juan on the major east-west highway across the northern side of the island. Most of the drive is on a limited-access toll road, but the traffic can be clogged and crawling on the San Juan end of the trip.

This year the ARRL was represented by Director Doug Rehman K4AC, Section Manager Rene Fonseca NP3O, Dave Sumner K1ZZ, and myself. We also had assistance from the very able Section Public Information Coordinator Angel Santana WP3GW. The event organizers do a good job helping the ARRL.

We had signage Spanish provided by HQ, along with membership applications in Spanish on one side and English on the other. Memberships sold briskly, and there was one application for Life Membership. The Handbook premium for 3-year memberships seemed quite effective.

Last year the only equipment manufacturer present was Yaesu. This year, although Yaesu’s presence was scaled down to a more realistic level for a small event, ICOM, FlexRadio, and Elecraft also exhibited. Ham Radio Deluxe software also exhibited. If these and other exhibitors are able to return in the future, the event could grow into a real attraction for hams throughout the Caribbean and northern South America.

This year an ARRL forum was added to the program. It was held under a fly located just outside the building. The only suitable indoor room is used for license examinations. Being outside was more comfortable, anyway. Every chair was occupied, and people were standing at the back. The conversation was very constructive. The only complaint we heard was about something that is beyond our control: that the shipping costs of ham gear to Puerto Rico using services such as UPS and FedEx are much greater than shipping costs over similar distances within the contiguous 48 states. Because he is in the package shipping business, Director Rehman was able to explain the situation clearly. If vendors were to use postal mail instead of a shipping service, the cost to the customer might well be reduced. As I said, the business practices of vendors are not subject to the ARRL’s control, but we might be able to discuss the subject with major vendors.

Social events are a big part of this convention. On Friday afternoon, we had a tour of the Arecibo Observatory including parts of the facility that regular tourists do not get to visit. Yaesu donated a rig to the KP4AO ham station at the observatory. During this presentation and accompanying to-do, the ICOM representative looked as if he had swallowed a sour pickle sideways, but he announced at the end of the convention that ICOM would be back in 2015.

On Friday evening there was a reception hosted by the PR Section with drinks and heavy snacks. We red badges made remarks. A fine cake showing the ARRL centennial logo was presented and a toast was drunk to the League.

On Saturday evening there was a party at an open-air social club to which one of the organizers belongs. It was out in the country up a dark, narrow road towards the observatory. Somehow, with Carter N3AO driving and me translating the interesting directions from Spanish, we found the place. The party is called a “coquí fest.” The coquí is a very small frog that is common on the island. I had heard them at night but never saw any until I nearly sat on one at this event. The fest included drinks, a buffet dinner, music, and dancing, plus some remarks and photo-taking.

The organizers of the event show genuine hospitality towards the ARRL representatives. It is a very small event but means a great deal to our members in Puerto Rico. Director Rehman has appointed the key organizer as one of his Assistant Directors, which should further the good relations developing between Puerto Rican Amateurs and the ARRL.

Respectfully submitted,

Kay Craigie N3KN