NORTHERN FLORIDA SECTION CONVENTION – ORLANDO HAMCATION

ARRL REGIONAL CENTENNIAL EVENT

www.hamcation.com

ORLANDO, FLORIDA

FEBRUARY 7-9, 2014

TRIP REPORT

Because it is one of the biggest hamfest / conventions in the country, the Orlando HamCation was tapped as one of the regional centennial events. The attractiveness of the Orlando area to tourism and the good organization of the hamfest have made it a popular, growing event. The weather is iffy. In some years the weather is fine. This year it was chilly and drizzly with occasional walloping downpours. That was better weather than other parts of the country were having, but it wasn’t what you have in mind when you think of Florida in February. However, the less-than-ideal weather did not deter attendance or reduce enthusiasm.

The event is held at a fairgrounds not far from the center of town. The ARRL booth was well situated near the entrance of one of the commercial exhibition buildings. We had space for a meet & greet, plus a section for sales of memberships, publications, and tchotchkes. The sales area was busy and sold a lot of memberships plus two Life Memberships. Especially on Saturday morning, our area was as crowded as I have ever seen a convention to be.

The centennial challenge coins were very popular give-aways. The design and execution of these commemorative items were a home run by our HQ Staff. A number of members also commented that they were looking forward to buying one of the commemorative Vibroplex keyers. Several members said they would be seeing us in July at the National.

I believe Mary Hobart had some good talks with donors at the meet & greet. Also working that area were Director Rehman, plus Vice Directors Lee and Allen. Wyoming ASM and former Staffer Katie Allen was working at the sales booth along with Bob Inderbitzen, Yvette Vinci, and Claire Isaacson. Vice President Fenstermaker and Vice Director Abernethy were visiting the Orlando area and were with us some of the time, too.

I did two video interviews, one for local television and one for a ham radio webcast.

W100AW/4 was active on the air from the convention. I did not have any involvement with that but am sure that Director Rehman could comment.

There was an ARRL forum on Saturday morning. At the ARRL table were Director Rehman, Vice Directors Lee and Allen, Vice President Fenstermaker, and me. We were prepared for push-back on the symbol rate petition but did not get any. Most of the comments were positive. One person was quite unhappy about the fact that ham radio does not get coverage by the national news media when there is a disaster. He was not interested in any of the facts about why that is the case or hearing that many other worthy volunteer groups working in disaster areas do not get any national media attention, either. Most people seemed to understand that just as all disasters are local, so all PR is local, too. Getting 90 seconds on the national evening news – assuming anybody still watches the evening news – might make us feel good about ourselves, but the key to substantive PR is developing and using local and state relationships with the media and others in a position to influence public opinion. Another somewhat combative question had to do with what the ARRL is doing at the national level to promote emergency communications. The implication was that we don’t do anything. Director Rehman and I had ready answers for that.

Orlando attracts a number of past ARRL officials whom I should mention in this report: President Emeritus Larry Price, Honorary Vice Presidents Evelyn Gauzens and Frank Butler, former Staffers Don Search and Ellen White, and past Director Art Goddard (who gave a forum ). I saw but did not have a chance to speak with past President Rod Stafford. IARU Region 2 President Reinaldo Leandro was there and stopped by the booth.

It had been many years since I saw HVP Evelyn Gauzens, who was Southeastern Division Vice Director for a long time. When I was among the three brand-new Vice Directors in 1990, Evelyn was the expert who taught us newbies how to behave and stay out of hot water at the Board meetings. Things were very different for inhabitants of the back row in those days. Although Evelyn is frail and uses a walker, her spirit and tart tongue are undiminished by the years. I was glad her son brought her to the convention.

The only problem at Orlando is that unlike at Dayton the forums cannot be held in or near the exhibit buildings. You have to really want to go to a forum and then to figure out how to get to the correct location. When the weather is rainy, as it was this time, walking to the forum sites may be unpleasant. We were lucky that our ARRL forum area was already under way before the bottom fell out twice during our hour.

Finally, many people commented enthusiastically about the centennial operating events, both the W1AW/x operations and the Centennial QSO Party. A number of people whom I had worked in the QSO Party came by the booth for a handshake. Please find the time to get on the air and take part in this operating event that reminds members that their ARRL is led by real hams like themselves who enjoy the ham bands as much as they do.

Respectfully submitted

Kay Craigie N3KN