

Second Century

Reflections on Hamvention®



"In May, I attended the annual gathering of ham radio operators and enthusiasts known to many simply as 'Dayton,' the event that graces the cover of this issue of QST. It had been a number of years since I traveled to the event, and this was the first time in my new capacity as Chief Executive Officer of ARRL."

Although I was not a neophyte, it turned out I wasn't quite ready for the experience — but I did come away pleasantly surprised with how well the event had transitioned to its new location while keeping the overall feel and attitude of the events that I remembered attending early in my career.

On Thursday night before the event, I attended the 17th Annual ARRL Donor Recognition Reception. The setting was the America's Packard Museum, a restored Packard dealership that operates as a museum and houses the largest collection of Packard automobiles and memorabilia in the world. If you ever get to Dayton, I highly recommend a visit. There I was able to meet a very special group of ARRL members, each one committed to supporting Amateur Radio and the organization above and beyond their individual membership in ARRL. The conversations were intriguing and ranged over a wide array of topics. I spent a lot of time just listening to these interesting people, soaking up knowledge.

Although I had spent some time on Thursday helping set up the ARRL EXPO exhibit space at the event, the finished product on Friday morning was a marvel — definitely not the simple, 30 linear feet of table space where we conducted business at my first Hamvention® in 1990. How we managed to do everything we did back then behind those three narrow tables, I'll never know. This year, we had separate areas for public service presentations, the College Amateur Radio Initiative (CARI), the ARRL DXCC program, the ARRL Field Organization, a meet-and-greet area, and a large area for sales of ARRL publications and memberships.

I spent most of my time at the event in the meet-and-greet area, renewing some old acquaintances and meeting hundreds of potential new ones. Never having been the public face of ARRL, it was a little overwhelming to discover that there were people who actually wanted to meet and talk with the "new guy" at ARRL Headquarters and, in some cases, get a picture with him! But I enjoyed meeting everyone, including those who wanted to discuss things they believed ARRL was doing wrong and/or could be doing better. Some of the interactions were lively, and all were engaging. I enjoyed every one of them. I also met many of the vendors and ARRL advertisers as well.

The fairgrounds in Xenia, Ohio, are obviously different than the event's old location, Hara Arena, but they suited the event well, in this writer's opinion. Inside space was adequate, and I'm told another building is planned for the future, which should ease some of the space considerations. The food trucks/concession stands were excellent and provided a wide assortment of options for lunch. The volunteers running the event were, as always, very accommodating and efficient as they went about the business of running the largest Amateur Radio event in this country. The Dayton Amateur Radio Association (DARA) should be rightfully proud of how all their members and volunteers come together to put this event on each and every year.

On my last evening in Dayton this year, I was honored to have been invited as a representative of ARRL at the DARA Awards dinner, where I was in the company of a "who's who" of Amateur Radio in the United States and, in some cases, the world. I was able to meet and talk with the leaders of many of the outstanding ham radio organizations in this country, a number of the most prominent people in Amateur Radio, and the leaders of DARA. I was lucky enough to be afforded this honor solely because of my position with ARRL. I was grateful to be included with this outstanding group of amateurs, many past winners of DARA awards. This year's award recipients represented technical and operating achievements in their fields, of which I was in awe. And you likely could have met any of them simply wandering around the convention throughout the weekend. That's the kind of event "Dayton" is, and always will be.

So, if you've never been to the Dayton, Ohio, area in May, I strongly encourage you to go at least once in your life. You're likely to be hooked and, as many do, return year after year to reconnect with old friends and learn about everything from advancements in equipment and technology to new operating activities in which you can participate. I guarantee you won't regret it. I know I'm looking forward to next year!

Barry J. Shelley, N1VXY