

2024 Dayton Hamvention®

By Tony Baker, AA3HD

Photos by Tony, AA3HD; Ben KE8YPT, and; Roberto, N9NUQ



What we know today as the Dayton Hamvention® started in 1952 as the Southwestern Ohio Ham-vention sponsored by the Dayton Amateur Radio Association (DARA), and it took place at the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Dayton. In 1953 the event became known as the Dayton Hamvention® and the name became a registered trademark. In 1964, Dayton Hamvention® moved to the Hara Arena, and in 2020 the event moved to its current location...the Greene County Fairgrounds and Exposition Center in Xenia, Ohio. Throughout, DARA has sponsored this gathering of amateur radio operators. From its meager beginnings of a one-day affair with only 600 in attendance, it has grown into the world's largest amateur radio event -- this year bringing in 35,877 attendees – lasting three days.



Bird's eye view of the fairgrounds during 2024 Hamvention

My journey to the 2024 Hamvention started in late summer 2023. At that time I found out that a friend of mine from one of my other hobbies, motorcycling, lived in Ohio and was a HAM -- Ben, KE8YPT -- something I did not know from our motorcycling adventures together. Despite not having seen each other for some nine years, we made plans for me to stay at his place for the duration of Hamvention, 17 thru 19 May. This would be my first time going to Hamvention, as it also was for Ben. I arrived the day before the event, and departed the day after it was all over. But Hamvention is more than just the happenings at the fairgrounds; numerous HAM-related events take place both the day before the formal event, and after hours when the fairgrounds shutdown during Hamvention. These extracurricular events included, but weren't limited to classes, HAM club get-togethers and dinners recognizing various aspects and contributors to our amateur radio hobby. I was fortunate enough to get invited to the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) Recognition Dinner the Thursday night before Hamvention, and was allowed to bring a guest, so Ben and I attended the occasion, which was held at the US Air Force Museum.



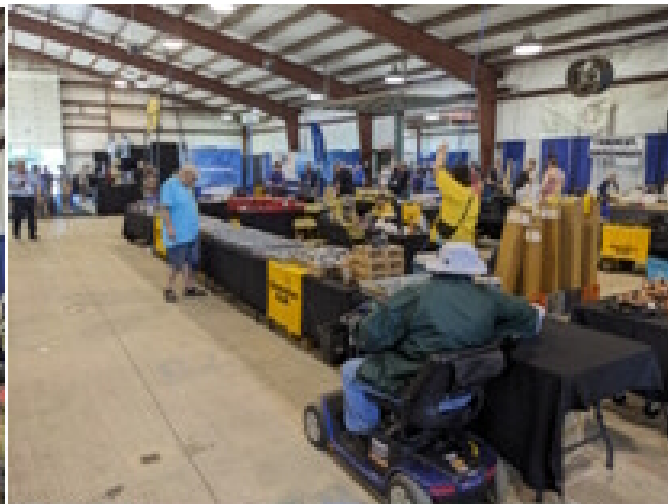
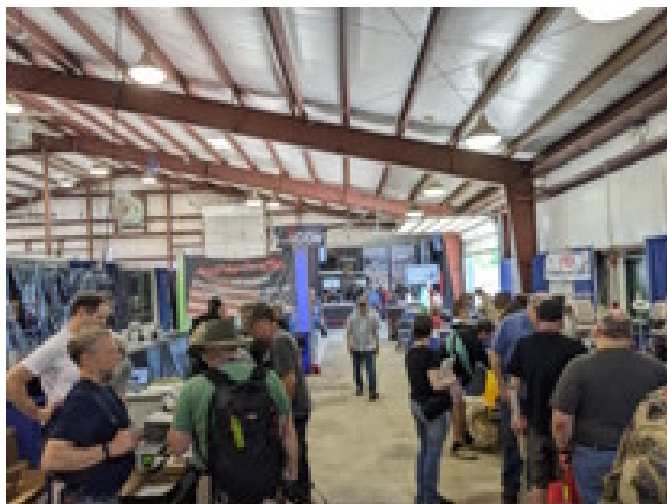
The next morning, Ben and I, and Ben's mentor (elmer) Bruce -- AC8BT -- set out for the fairgrounds in Xenia, Ohio. It was a good thing we arrived early, because the lineup to get into the fairgrounds just to park was quite long. To make matters worse, there was a steady rain. Others I knew who had previously attended Hamvention -- as well as Bruce -- had warned Ben and me that rain was a real possibility during the event, so I was prepared with both a light poncho and an umbrella. Bruce had been to Hamvention many times before, but hadn't been in a few years, so all three of us were quite excited

in the rain as we slogged through the mud of the parking area toward what appeared to be two extremely long lines of people waiting for the gates to open. While in one of the lines, I noticed some folks from Maine in the other line – Joe, W1SK; Steve, KD1O , and; Mike, N1STN . I went over to chat with them a bit, and would again run into them throughout Hamvention. At 9:00AM sharp the gates opened, and the flood of people (and rain) poured in. Everyone made their way to the buildings to get under cover.



There are basically seven large buildings on the fairgrounds with a few smaller buildings as well. Despite the fact that we had studied maps of the layout of where things were at Hamvention, we found ourselves referring to the maps on several occasions...I found the whole experience somewhat overwhelming at times, but always fun. Bruce knew what he wanted to do and headed straight for the flea market area, which was the entire infield of the racetrack, and then some. That first day Ben and I wanted to just look around a bit and get a feel for the place...so that's what we did – along with the thousands of other attendees who were mostly inside one of the buildings because of the rain. Inside the various buildings there were not only all kinds of HAM radio equipment vendors, but also HAM radio related subject matter booths as well. Major

radio manufacturers like Elecraft, Flex, Icom, Kenwood, and Yaesu were there, as were HAM radio equipment retailers like DX Engineering, Giga Parts, and Ham Radio Outlet, plus hundreds more...some of whom I was familiar with like BridgeCom, Rig Expert, SteppIR, Comet, and Quicksilver Radio, and many more I had never heard of.



**Some of the indoor vendors at
at the 2024 Hamvention.**

By 1:00 p.m. the rain had stopped. Ben and I were pretty hungry by that time and we had our choice of numerous food trucks onsite. We ended up having Mexican food on Friday, Gyros on Saturday, and pork chop sandwiches on Sunday. The pork chop sandwich was by far my favorite of the three days, but I have got to say that the homemade ice cream was pretty good too, particularly on Saturday and Sunday when the sun came out and drove the temperatures up into the mid-80's, turning all the mud to dust.



My pork chop sandwich was the best!!

By the afternoon on Friday, neither Ben nor I had seen Bruce, who was still perusing the more than 2,500 outdoor flea market vendors. Ben was scheduled to go to a Parks on the Air (POTA) forum in the afternoon, and I had attended a kit building forum that ran from noon to 1:00 p.m. Throughout the three days, there were over 55 forums on every possible subject related to HAM radio. The other forums I attended were *A Fun and New Way to Learn Morse Code*, *Good Operators and Interference*, and *Tips for Successful Radio Clubs*. Many of the forums were put on by the ARRL, which coincidentally had picked the 2024 Dayton Hamvention® as the site for their 2024 National Convention. The ARRL booth area was amongst the larger indoor display areas. ARRL Maine Section Manager Phil Duggan, N1EP was there, as were many other ARRL personnel. I was glad I had an opportunity to renew my acquaintance with ARRL President Rick Roderick, K5UR, (who I had first met at the 2023 HamXposition in Marlborough, MA), since I was unable to do so the night before because he was busy speaking to the many people who attended the ARRL Recognition Dinner. At the ARRL booth, I also was able to get my QSL cards checked and certified for inclusion in my Log Book of the World account.



By the end of the day Friday, Bruce finally showed up at the center courtyard area of the fairgrounds. He had purchased some used test equipment in the flea market area. As we made the drive back home, tired as we were, we all reminisced with joy our adventures that day. Ben and I had two more days of Hamvention adventure awaiting us as Bruce only wanted to attend on Friday. On Friday I hadn't had much opportunity to explore the flea market area, so on Saturday I began the trek to see what there was to see...more than I could take in in the four hours I had allotted!! There was mostly used equipment, but some new items too, throughout the flea market. I wasn't really in the market to buy anything used, and I didn't. But, if one was interested in purchasing used HAM-related gear, I'm sure it could be found in the flea market area.



I had made three previous QSO's with a HAM named Roberto, N9NUQ...the most recent in April of 2024. Roberto lives in Chicago, is involved in law enforcement, and is preparing to retire in July 2024. During our April rag-chew on 20 meters we discovered we would both be at Hamvention. Roberto would be wearing a very distinctive jacket with numerous law enforcement patches. I told him I would keep an eye out for him and would definitely meet him if I saw him. Low and behold, we did meet. I presented him with another patch for his jacket...a patch from where I worked for 35 and-a-half years.



Besides attending forums Saturday, Ben and I also spent some more time to take a closer look at the more than 500 indoor vendors. Friday had been such a whirlwind, we were glad we now had some more time to take a more leisurely look. Also, DARA had set up a special event station at Hamvention...W8BI. The special event station was transmitting on 20 meters. Both Ben and I...worked the station for a while. I worked six QSO's, including one to India.



**Ben, KE8YPT and I work
W8BI at the 2024
Hamvention.**

On Saturday night, Ben and I attended the Contest Dinner at the Hope Hotel in Dayton that was sponsored by DX Engineering and featured Tim Duffy, K3LR as one of the speakers. The dinner was primarily attended by contesters, and although I'm not a big-gun contester, I do enjoy the contests in which I participate. At this dinner, I again saw Mainer Steve, KD1O, and another Mainer – Tim, WT1A. The dinner also recognized three new amateur radio operators inducted into the CQ Contest Hall of Fame...Sergio, PP5JR; Steven, N2IC, and; Richard, K2MGA – SK. When looking through my log on QRZ.com on my cell phone, I saw that I had had QSO's with Tim Duffy as well as Sergio and Steven. All of a sudden I didn't feel so out of place.



Again on Sunday, Ben and I were back at the Xenia fairgrounds before the gates opened for the last day of the 2024 Dayton Hamvention®. We would attend some more forums, and I would finally get to go thru the rest of the flea market vendors. The event would wrap up at 1:00 p.m., and it probably was a good thing that it did because Ben and I were pretty much exhausted. I should note that there was an International Relations Booth where visitors could voluntarily sign in and put a pin in a map showing where they came from. When I asked how many countries were represented, I was told that people from 38 different countries had signed in. I should also note that the ARRL

counterpart leagues from Canada, Germany, Great Britain, and Japan also had booths at the 2024 Hamvention. There is so much more that I could talk about, like the exam sessions, youth activities, (which were of primary focus for the event), the hourly door-prize giveaways, new radio models, new software, etc., etc., etc., that it probably would take me three days to write about it all. Bottom line, I had a great time and want to thank the some 700 volunteers that made the event possible and a genuine success. If I have the opportunity to go to another Dayton Hamvention® I will definitely go, and if you haven't ever been, you need to put it on your bucket list. I'll leave you with one last photo.

