

National Hamfest Vendor Appreciation Month

My predecessor in this seat, the late Alan Dorhoffer, K2EEK, used to love telling stories about “Travels With CQ,” regaling readers with the adventures and misadventures—and mostly the food—encountered on trips to various hamfests around the country. As we mark the tenth anniversary of Alan’s passing in the summer of 1999, I thought it would be an appropriate tribute to return to his favorite topic, particularly since circumstances have conspired/cooperated to give me some great stories to pass along (great, that is, as long as you weren’t in the middle of them).

If you’re like most hams, you go to one or two local hamfests each year, and if you’re lucky, perhaps one of the bigger regional shows and/or the Dayton Hamvention®. At the bigger shows, you’ll get to meet manufacturers’ representatives and other vendors—including us—who may travel a thousand miles or more to be there to greet you. Chances are, you don’t think too often about what’s involved in getting there for those of us who devote multiple weekends each year to displaying and/or selling stuff at hamfests, including dicey travel connections, delayed or missing freight shipments, and other encounters with Murphy. Therefore, I wanted to give you an opportunity this month to get a glimpse from “the other side of the booth.”

The hamfest circuit in mid-June brings us to Plano, Texas, about 45 minutes north of Dallas, for Ham-Com. Traveling in the central U.S. in June carries with it the great likelihood of encountering delays due to the big late-spring thunderstorms that regularly pop up, sometimes spawning tornadoes as well. Ham-Com is a Friday/Saturday show, which means that the vendors roll in Wednesday or Thursday in order to have their booths set up by the time the doors open on Friday morning. This year, the Dallas area—and particularly the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport (DFW)—got hit with massive thunderstorms both on Wednesday night and Thursday morning, forcing the airport to shut down for several hours on both days. Here are a few stories of what some of us had to go through to get there ... and it’s worth noting, by the way, that several vendors had been at the Seapac show in the Pacific Northwest the previous weekend, so they barely had time to get back home before packing up and hitting the road again.

Eric Swartz, WA6HHQ, of Elecraft, was one of those folks. He left Monterey, California at 3:30 Wednesday afternoon to fly to Los Angeles and get a connecting flight to Dallas. When he arrived in LA, he found that his scheduled flight had been cancelled, and he was put on the next flight, which was delayed. He arrived in Dallas just as the Wednesday night storm was beginning, and was informed that the airport was closed and that the bags couldn’t be removed from the plane until the rain ended. He was advised to come back for them in the morning. When he got there on Thursday, the morning storms had already begun! Fortunately, his bags were already inside, but he had to load them up and drive back to

Oops...

We misidentified the prime sponsor of House bill H.R. 2160 in last month’s “Zero Bias” editorial. Her correct name is Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee, not Shirley. Our apologies to the Congresswoman. Also, in the first sentence of that editorial, we listed the bill number as H.R. 12160. The correct number is 2160, shown correctly in all other references. We regret any confusion.

Plano in a massive storm that dumped six inches of rain on the airport in just a few hours’ time!

Phil Parton, N4DRO, Kenwood’s national sales manager for amateur radio products, was flying out of Atlanta. His flight Thursday morning took off an hour and a half late. During the flight, the pilot told them DFW was closed and that they would need to circle, which they did for an hour and half before landing. Phil’s luggage didn’t make the trip with him, arriving on the following flight.

CQ Advertising Manager, Don Allen, W9CW, flying in Thursday morning on a commuter jet from Illinois, took off on time and landed on time ... right after DFW was shut down. Since no planes were taking off, there were no gates open for arriving flights, and he sat on the tarmac in that little regional jet for more than three hours!

Julius Jones, W2IHY, of W2IHY Technologies, was flying to Dallas from White Plains, NY by way of Atlanta. He was due in at DFW at 11:40 AM. His first flight left nearly an hour late and he had to run through the airport in Atlanta to make his connection, which took off right on time. About an hour in, though, the pilot reported that DFW was closed and that they were returning to Atlanta. He got back there about the time he was supposed to arrive in Dallas, got rebooked on a 5 PM flight, and got in around 7 PM, too late to start setting up for the show. Fortunately, the Ham-Com folks were very accommodating and opened the hall an hour early (6 AM) on Friday morning for vendors who hadn’t been able to set up the night before. (*A collective “thank you” to the Ham-Com folks from all of us.*)

Heil Sound’s Chip Margelli, K7JA, found that his 9:45 AM Thursday flight out of Orange County Airport in California was cancelled and was told there were no seats available until Friday morning on any flight out of Orange County, Ontario, or LAX (Los Angeles International). Chip found a 3:30 PM departure out of San Diego and drove down there. The flight was about to push back from the gate when the pilot announced there was an electrical problem. Everybody off the plane. ... Luckily, according to Chip, “another MD80, which had escaped from DFW,” was on the ground in San Diego. It was pressed into service as a replacement and he arrived in Dallas at 12:30 AM Friday.

Dave Rosenbaum from Battery Tech had an 11:30 AM Thursday flight out of La Guardia Airport in New York City, which was delayed to 2:00 PM and then cancelled. He was rebooked on a 3 o’clock flight out of JFK Airport, which was also delayed and then cancelled. He was offered a seat the next morning on a flight to Dallas via Boston, but declined. He found a

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9:00 PM departure out of La Guardia, but was told it was full and had a huge waiting list. He put himself on the list anyway and kept calling to see if anything had opened up. At 7:00 PM, he was told he had a seat. He rushed to the airport, only to find the flight had been delayed until 11:30, when it finally did take off. He touched down at DFW at about 3 o'clock Friday morning.

And then there was my trip ... I was scheduled on a 7:30 AM flight out of Newark Airport in New Jersey on Thursday, due into DFW at about 10:15 AM. When I arrived just before 6 AM, I found that my flight had been cancelled due to mechanical problems, and I was rebooked on a 9 AM flight out of La Guardia, on the other side of New York City. The airline provided a van to take us over there, but the driver didn't know how to get there! Luckily, I knew the route (everyone else on the van

was from Texas) and we made it without a problem. My flight took off right on time, but the pilot told us we'd arrive about 45 minutes late because he was being routed around the line of storms that ended up shutting down DFW. About an hour and a half into the flight, he told us we were being diverted to Chicago in order to give connecting passengers a chance to make new connections from O'Hare, and that the rest of us would "take it from there." We spent three hours at a gate there (which I spent visiting with John Kalotai, N1OLO, and Ned Bassick, KA1CVV, from West Mountain Radio, who were on the same flight with me), and eventually arrived at DFW around 4:00 PM.

Since my chauffeur (Don) was already in Plano setting up our booth, John and Ned were nice enough to give me a ride, since they had plenty of room in their rental car

because we were too late for them to pick up their stuff for the show from the UPS depot, where it was waiting for them! They had to go pick it up Friday morning before heading to the show to set up and be "open for business" when the doors opened at 9:00 AM.

So... the next time you go to hamfest and you see folks there who traveled halfway across the country in order to be able to talk with you, please take a moment to think about the effort that has gone into getting them there - even without a mess on the scale of Dallas this June - and maybe take a minute to thank them for being there.

Therefore... By the power vested in me by no one in particular, I hereby declare the month of August to be National Hamfest Vendor Appreciation Month. No applause, please. Just spend money!

73, W2VU
