

Yanks Come Marching In

Bombers help Puerto Rican community celebrate heritage at Tampa parade and festival

By Manuel García

On April 24, the 22nd annual *Parada Cultural de Puerto Rico y Festival Folklórico* took place in Tampa, Florida, and for the first time in its history, the postparade festival was carried out at the New York Yankees' spring training home, George M. Steinbrenner Field.

The Yankees' involvement in the Puerto Rico Cultural Parade and Folkloric Festival also included a float, which carried the Tampa Yankees mascot, Blue; several up-and-coming Latino minor leaguers; and Bronx community leaders Hector Aponte, Bronx Borough Parks commissioner; Lenny Caro, president of the Bronx Chamber of Commerce; and Maria Roman, honorary board member of the National Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York City.

"The Puerto Rican community is a very big part of our fan base and has been for many, many years," said Yankees

executive vice president/chief international officer Felix M. Lopez, Jr. "It was only natural for us to partake in this great cultural event, which united the Puerto Rican communities from all over the U.S. and specifically those from Tampa and the Bronx."

In addition to the floats, the parade included horses, motorcycles, music and the royal court — the young women competing for the title of Miss Puerto Rico Culture Parade. The parade concluded at Raymond James Stadium, home of the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers, and from there, parade-goers crossed North Dale Mabry Highway to Steinbrenner Field to enjoy the postparade festival.

The festival, which lasted long into the evening, provided the thousands in attendance with, among other things, Puerto Rican cuisine, live music, dancers and artisan stands. ❧

