Celebrating freedom

Annual fireworks event gives chance to spend time with family, be thankful

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GREENFIELD — The first three fireworks streaked into the darkening sky as the band played the national anthem, a fitting start to a half-hour show accompanied by “vows” and “vels” from captivated spectators.

Each rocket launched into the cool night air with a whooshing sound, leaving wisps of smoke billowing up from beside Pel’s Seat Tower, which is topped by an American flag. Each exploded with a pop, lighting up the night sky and field below.

As the explosions came closer together and covered more of the sky, signaling the show’s finale, spectators cheered, whistled and applauded and children uttered excited squeals. The blasts were often so powerful they could be felt.

Thousands of people turned out from across the Pioneer Valley for Greenfield’s annual Independence Day fireworks, which began at 9:30 p.m. after hours of festivities at Beacon Field. At around 7 p.m., Christy Moore, director of the Greenfield Recreation Department, took the stage to present. At Large Town Councillor Penny Ricketts with the Fortin Family 2016 Volunteer Award. The award is given annually to recognize an individual for outstanding service to the Greenfield community.

Starting at 4 p.m., musical acts took the stage, vendors sold food, drinks and children’s toys, and a small train circled the field giving rides to children and adults. Illusionists and funny clowns peppered the field. As the sun set, families and friends gathered to watch the show.

Fireworks

FROM A.P.
gathered to play Valkyrie, toss baseballs, throw Frisbees and socialize.

Andy Otter Jr., 43, rested on a blanket on the ground with an American flag banner around his neck, surrounded by his parents, Deirdre and Andy Otter Sr., and his girlfriend Kim Stone. They were nestled on red-white and blue blankets while waiting for the fireworks to begin, a tradition for the Otter family for at least seven years.

“This is the only place you can see the (fireworks) with no trees in the way,” said the younger Otter. “It’s the best spot.”

Otter Jr. is somewhat of an expert on local fireworks shows. In just one year, he attended Independence Day fireworks shows in Greenfield, Easthampton, South Hadley, Chicopee, Springfield, East Longmeadow, Bulong, and Enfield, Conn., as well as at six Flips New England. He now travels 45 minutes each year to see Greenfield’s fireworks.

“It’s a small, nice community,” he said of Greenfield. “It’s just more peaceful out here,” said Ed Morozwicks of Lee, who was attending the Greenfield show for the first time in 29 years. “You always like these the best because they shoot them off the tower.”

Morozwicks served in the Army from 1979 to 1981, when he was stationed in Germany. Being a veteran, Independence Day fireworks have taken on a whole new meaning for Morozwicks.

“I love coming to the fireworks because it’s all about what this country’s really about,” he said. “It’s all about freedom.”

Sharah Godin of Orange, who feels similarly about Independence Day’s significance after talking with a Vietnam veteran about her wartime experience.

“You learn more as you get older and appreciate what people have done for this country,” she said.

Godin has been coming to Greenfield’s fireworks show for eight years, and brought her children, grandchildren and extended family to spend the day with her.

“This is a big tradition for my family every year,” Godin said of Greenfield’s Independence Day festivities. “We set up early, bring out the grill, enjoy some fired dough and do kid stuff.”

Greenfield’s Independence Day festivities provide Godin and her family with a balance of fireworks, roll around, blow bubbles, play with glow sticks, throw Frisbees and skip across the field.

“The kids jump from the edge of the tower, Godin said. “It’s a fun time to go out with friends.”

Tagyn Daigonant, 6, of Greenfield has his face painted at the Greenfield Independence Day fireworks celebration at Beacon Field, Saturday.

and that’s what’s important.”

Alina Lachance, 11, of Athol came to the event for the second year in a row with three friends. In addition to appreciating the environment and how the fireworks are launched from the tower, Lachance enjoys the opportunity to be with those who are important to her.

“I just really enjoy the Fourth of July,” she said. “It’s a fun time to go out with friends.”

Left, Dennis Thierens of Greenfield sits on his bike and watches one of the bands perform at the Greenfield Independence Day fireworks celebration at Beacon Field, Saturday. Right, attendees line up in front of the food vendors prior to the fireworks display.