

Independence Day

firework shows and festivals

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For 149 years, American citizens have celebrated their freedom and independence during

the federal holiday on July 4.

Independence Day, commonly just called “Fourth of July,” gives citizens an opportunity to express their freedoms when it comes to how they worship, live their lives

and pursue happiness.

Throughout Jefferson County the surrounding areas, there are plenty of opportunities to celebrate with other Americans next week. From meet-and-greets with

Benjamin Franklin, to lawn games, live music, fun runs and 5Ks, there is plenty to keep you and your family busy during next week's Independence Day celebrations.

Monticello

Once again, the local American Legion Otto M. Walker Post #49 will be hosting the annual fireworks display in Jefferson County.

This free evening show will be held at the Tiger Stadium, located off South Water Street, behind the old high school campus.

On Thursday, July 4, the Tiger Stadium concession stand will open at 7 p.m., where they will be selling hot boiled peanuts, hotdogs, chips and cold drinks.

At 7:30 p.m., a live band will take to the stage and provide music to dance along with.

Throughout the evening, strategic military vehicles and helicopters will be on display, sponsored by Jefferson County's Georgia-Florida Aviation Search and Rescue Team (G-FAST).

What is Jefferson County's Independence Day celebration without its celebrity visitor? Once again, Benjamin Franklin (played by Lloyd Wheeler) will be wandering around the grounds, visiting with celebrators and entertaining the crowd.

The program will start at 8:15 p.m., while the fireworks extravaganza should begin around 9:30 p.m. Wallace O.

Bullock/Pyroworks, LLC., a local Jefferson County pyro works company, will be putting on a show worth seeing!

For more information about this event or to donate towards helping cover the cost of the fireworks, contact Post 49 Commander Ken Faircloth at (850) 509-2628.

All donations are tax-deductible.

Tallahassee

Want to do more than just watch fireworks? The Capital City Kiwanis Club is hosting a Firecracker 5K and 1-mile Sparkler Fun Run on Thursday, July 4.

Both races will be held at Cascades Park (located at 1001 S. Gadsden St., in Tallahassee) on July 4.

Runners who register for either the Firecracker 5K or 1-Mile Sparkler Fun Run before June 30 will pay a fee of \$20 (with shirt) or \$15 (no shirt). After June 30, registration fees will go up, so sign up now!

Children under the age of 10 who will be participating in either of the two runs will be offered a discounted rate and given a shirt at no additional cost.

Discounted registration fees will be offered to event sponsors, local fitness groups and various clubs who choose to run together.

Runners with strollers are welcome, but Capital City Kiwanis requests that stroller-runners line up at the back of the start line and give right of way to all runners. Leashed dogs (accompanying a registered runner) are also welcome.

On-site registration will begin at 6:30 a.m. on July 4. The 1-Mile fun run will begin at 7:30 a.m. and the 5K will start at 8 a.m.

After runners return and results are tabulated, an awards ceremony will be held at 9 a.m. For more information or to register for either race, visit cckcfirecracker5k.com.

Cascades Park is located only 26.2 miles, or 36 minutes, from the Monticello Courthouse Circle.

Tallahassee

The City of Tallahassee will be hosting their annual Celebrate America Festival on Thursday, July 4.

Filled with food vendors, a beer garden, arts and crafts booths, live entertainment, a kid's activity area and fireworks, this event is a free, exciting experience for locals and visitors.

Held at Tom Brown Park (located at 330 Easterwood Dr., in Tallahassee), the festival will begin at 6 p.m. with live music.

A welcoming ceremony will be held at 7:50 p.m., followed by a naturalization ceremony at 8 p.m.

Fireworks will begin lighting up the night sky over the park at 9:45 p.m.

Parking is free, but also limited, so event organizers advise arriving as early as possible to ensure parking opportunities.

No personal fireworks (including sparklers), personal alcohol, grills or tents will be permitted during this event.

The Celebrate America Festival is also an animal-free event (except for certified service animals), so it's best to leave your pet at home if you plan to attend.

Tom Brown Park is located only 24.4 miles, or 32 minutes from the Monticello Courthouse Circle.

Thomasville, Ga.

What's better than lawn games, live music and free icy-cold watermelon slices? All of that and fireworks, of course!

On July 4, Thomasville will be hosting their annual Independence Day celebration with fresh watermelon, lawn games, live music and fireworks at The Ritz Amphitheater (located at 131 S. Stevens St., in Thomasville, Ga.).

Celebration festivities will begin at 6:30 p.m. as attendees enjoy the provided games, food and music in downtown Thomasville.

The firework display will begin at 9:30 p.m.

Guests are encouraged to bring their lawn chairs or blankets to spread out on the grass as they eat watermelon, listen to delightful music and enjoy the dazzling fireworks.

The Thomasville Amphitheater is located only 22.5 miles, or 28 minutes, from the Monticello Courthouse Circle.

Staying safe while playing with “fire”

Use your sparklers (and other legal fireworks) on a hard, flat surface. Do not light them on a grassy or flammable surface.

Light your fireworks just once; if you come across a 'dud' sparkler, don't attempt to relight it.

Don't use any fireworks that are unwrapped upon purchase or appear to have been tampered with.

Keep a fire extinguisher or water hose close at hand while lighting your sparklers, just in case.

Use sparklers in an open area. Stay clear of trees, bushes, vehicles or structures.

Keep children and pets at least 30 feet away from all ignited sparklers.

When lighting your sparkler fireworks, don't place your body directly over the firework.

Only purchase fireworks from licensed vendors.

When a sparkler has been used, it is a good idea to drop them into a bucket of water to prevent an accident.

Never carry sparklers in your pocket or shoot them off from metal or glass containers.

Legal for *who*?

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What is a hot Independence Day night without the sparkle, crackle and explosion of fireworks in the night sky?

For some, getting their firework fill is done through visiting local fireworks shows and Independence Day celebrations, but the more adventurous, the more daring and brave might attempt to put on their own shows.

Without acknowledging the danger of putting on your own firework show, you might want to take a look at the laws surrounding the purchasing, use and possession of fireworks.

Under Florida law, it is prohibited for any unlicensed person to purchase fireworks that fly through the air or explode – that includes popular firework types such as bottle rockets, mortars or roman candles.

Unless you are permitted, the only fireworks which you can legally purchase and light are those which classified as 'sparklers'.

So, if it's illegal, how do firework vendors get around the law?

When selling fireworks, the vendors will require the purchasing party to sign a waiver that promises that the fireworks are going to be used to scaring off birds and animals. This waiver is the 'get out of jail free card' that lets vendors off the hook for selling fireworks. When you read the fine print, you realize that the waiver does nothing to protect the consumer, and everything to protect the store.

In Florida, it is a misdemeanor to possess or use illegal fireworks. Those caught face a fine up to \$1,000 and a year's prison sentence.

“But everyone does it!” you might say.

True, but everyone jaywalks and speeds; there are always those who get caught and every time you purchase and fire off fireworks illegally, you are choosing to take the risk that you might be the one caught. Plus, while they may be dazzling in the night sky, the truth is that fireworks are dangerous explosive that can cause harm to those who are inexperienced and untrained in the safety protocols for firing them off.

When you choose to light fireworks illegally, you do more than risk breaking the law, you risk endangering yourself and those around you.

Is it really worth the risk?

For a complete list of approved sparkler-type fireworks, visit myfloridacfo.com/division/sfm/BFP/ApprovedSparklerLists.htm.