

Giving the Gifts of Freedom

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Their love of Old Glory stirred by the nation's highest court, Americans waved the flag with a passion July Fourth, handing out thousands of new ones and reverently retiring old and tattered ones by burning them.

A medal of liberty was awarded to Polish union leader Lech Walesa in Philadelphia, a Cuban immigrant threw open his home in gratitude to his adopted country, and Winthrop Paul Rockefeller, a great-grandson of Standard Oil founder John D. Rockefeller, put on an Arkansas fireworks display that drew 100,000.

Seven Chinese students at the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma used an Independence Day ceremony to announce they want political asylum in the United States.

"We want to publicly denounce the Chinese government by asking for asylum," said graduate student Guohua Zheng, 25.

In Boston, the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts observed the holiday by honoring the fallen pro-democracy protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

About 200,000 people turned out for the annual Boston Pops concert at the Hatch Shell on the Esplanade at night. The music was capped with a fireworks display.

New York City celebrated with a spectacular 30-minute nighttime fireworks display that included a Liberty Bell, space rocket and star formations and "America" written across the sky.

Earlier, about 2 million people packed the beach and boardwalk at Coney Island to watch an air show featuring F-16 jet maneuvers and Green Berets parachuting from helicopters, said show chairman Milton Berger.

In Seattle, about 500 people representing 51 countries became Americans as hundreds of others, including two congressmen, welcomed them on a rare sunny Fourth of July in Seattle.

They weren't so lucky in the nation's capital, where it rained on the estimated 20,000 people who turned out for the annual Fourth of July parade.

"Everybody was smiling and being more congenial because we had the bad weather as a common denominator," said John Shaw, who came to Washington from Augusta, Maine.

However, at the annual fireworks at the Washington Monument that followed, two people were shot and wounded, and several others suffered minor injuries when they were reportedly trampled, police said.

About 400,000 people turned out for the fireworks, police said.

At the Arkansas site where the fireworks display was held, Rockefeller, son of the state's late governor, said there's more to the celebration he's sponsored for the last 10 years than money.

"I love it," he said. "To see the kids and the older folks, the people who fought to keep this country free, it's just a humdinger of a Fourth of July."

Thousands of flags were given away in Milwaukee and Chicago, and aging hippies at a counterculture gathering in Nevada displayed the Stars and Stripes, and a week after the Supreme Court ruled that burning the flag in protest is protected by the Constitution, American Legion posts retired old flags by burning them.

"It's the proper way to burn any tattered, torn flag that needs to be destroyed," said John Comer as Legionnaires in Manchester, Mass., destroyed 50 old flags in a ceremony that traditionally includes prayers.

In Newport News, Va., Vice President Dan Quayle defended the Bush administration's proposal to ban flag burning.

"Around the world, Old Glory is recognized and revered as the symbol of freedom. Too many Americans have laid down their lives in the defense of freedom to treat this symbol lightly," Quayle said at a ceremony to honor the USS Newport News, the Navy's newest submarine.

Just outside Miami, Cuban immigrant and exporter Eduardo Martinez again threw open his Hacienda Mardenpaz to tens of thousands. As visitors examined scaled-down versions of the White House and the Statue of Liberty, bands played a mixture of Latin music, country and rock.

"I do this as a tribute to America because we are very grateful to this country," he said.

Solidarity leader Walesa was hailed for "his personal triumph" of hope in Poland as his wife accepted Philadelphia's first Liberty

Medal and a \$100,000 cash award on his behalf in a ceremony outside Independence Hall.

"The timing of this Philadelphia Liberty Medal award coincides with a particular moment in Poland," said Danuta Walesa, speaking for her husband. "Our many years of struggle for the right to our own nation is entering into its decisive phase."

She referred to Tuesday's events in Warsaw, where for the first time since the late 1940s an opposition group was installed in a Soviet bloc legislature. A total of 259 Solidarity deputies and senators took their seats in the National Assembly next to members of a communist coalition.

The mood was more outrage than solidarity in Boston, where more than 3,000 abortion rights activists protested Monday's Supreme Court ruling on a Missouri abortion case.

"How ironic that the Supreme Court is poised to take away a cherished right when the nation is commemorating our extraordinary tradition of individual liberty," said Pam Nourse, director of Mass Choice.

In Milwaukee, about 18 volunteers were cheered by passersby as they placed some 1,500 flags along the streets. "People were honking their horns, giving me the peace sign and giving me thumbs up," said Marietta Redding. "I love apple pie, grandmas and the flag."

In Chicago, businessman Ted Kamberos played flag elf for the third year, planting 1,000 American flags along the streets with help from a dozen friends. "There are so few people in America who would consider burning a flag. They've given this gentleman a stage and I think they're making a lot of hoopla about nothing," the 41-year-old Greek immigrant said of the Supreme Court decision that upheld a protester's right to burn the flag.

American flags fluttered at the 18th annual Rainbow Family of Living Light reunion of more than 5,000 people in Nevada's Humboldt National Forest. "This Independence Day means a lot to me, because it means freedom from power, from authority," said Linda Edwards, 45, a Santa Cruz, Calif., activist for the homeless.

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