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FRONT

PATRIOTISM NOW A DRIVING FORCE ; This Fourth, Americans are sad, proud - and not at all bashful about their flag.

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Today is different.

We Americans are a little sadder today than we were last Independence Day. We are a little more solemn.

And a whole lot prouder.

We will celebrate like always, with picnics and fireworks and concerts.

But as familiar as the celebrations are, they are different. We celebrate this year in defiance and under threat. In Washington, D.C., our fellow countrymen celebrate behind security fences, the air above them patrolled by fighter jets.

This year, "Stars and Stripes Forever" means something new.

Since Sept. 11, there is a new patriotism. It faded a bit in the months after the terrorist attacks, but it is strong.

Maybe even growing.

A few days after the attacks, Donna Barnard put a little flag outside her house in Portland.

She has since replaced it with a bigger one.

"We bought the house four years ago," she said. "We never had a flag."

Now, the flag is part of her life. Every day, if the weather is good, she puts it up.

It is a new ritual, for her, and a meaningful one.

"Our kids ask, 'Why are we doing this now?' and we say, 'Remember when,'" she explained. "We're very lucky that we live in this country."

Kathy Duca has an older ritual. Every year for the past nine or 10 years, Duca, a real estate agent, has planted flags - more than 400 of them - in lawns around South Portland. Usually, the little swaths of red, white and blue are the sole signs of patriotism.

Not this year.

"I know I saw lots of bows today on street signs," she said. "I certainly noticed many more flags being displayed than in the past."

Rita Gott was struck as she walked the greenbelt in South Portland and saw how many flags waved.

"I was amazed at the different flags," she said. "Just going out on the street, more and more people have got flags and other ornaments and things out representing the flag and the country."

Ellis Verdi can explain.

He is the president of DeVito/Verdi, an advertising agency in New York, which produced the Ad Council commercial that is now airing.

The spot shows a row of houses - in Bayonne, N.J., yet. An announcer says that the terrorists wanted to change America forever.

Then it shows the block again, only this time, there's a flag in front of each house.

"They did," the announcer says.

"The reaction," Verdi said, "has been absolutely phenomenal."

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It is Verdi's job to understand how Americans feel, and they feel patriotic, he said.

"We're living in a different world today," he said. "We have to protect our core way of life."

Today is different in ways subtle and obvious.

At the Point Sebago Golf and Beach Resort in Casco, they've painted a fairway with an American flag. The tee markers are red, white and blue.

The golfers love it.

"They love what it stands for," said Gerry White, the course's superintendent. "After 9-1-1, I think everyone has that patriotic blood in them."

He said he never would have thought of painting such a thing - and certainly never permitted it - before Sept. 11.

But things are different now.

"What 9-1-1 brought to our attention is, we are the United States," he said. "We are not bulletproof, but our patriotism is very important to us."

Today is different in Maine and across the country.

A CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll shows that eight of every 10 Americans plan to display an American flag this year, compared to two-thirds last year. Slightly more than one-third of all Americans will do something today to remember what happened 10 months ago.

Today is a celebration of freedom, a commemoration of what happened in Congress on July 4, 1776, of "the unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America."

The world became different that summer day.

The 13 states are 50 now, and different, but united anew.

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What's Open Today is Independence Day; a state and federal holiday. State and federal offices are closed; as are post offices and town and city halls. All major banks and credit unions are closed. The Maine Mall will be open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Many other retailers and restaurants are open; some for shortened hours. Hannaford and Shaw's supermarkets will be open; although some stores may be open for shortened hours. Metro buses will not operate.

Caption: Staff photo by Faith Cathcart Marlene Dunton prepares to hit her second shot Tuesday from a fairway with a distinctly patriotic theme - the fourth hole at the Point Sebago Golf and Beach Resort in Casco. The resort collaborated recently with Sports Fields Inc. of Monmouth to paint a large American flag on the fairway grass. Staff photo by Faith Cathcart Patriotism - and patriotic displays - are in full swing this holiday, as evidenced by the 46- by-26-foot American flag painted on the fourth fairway at the Point Sebago Golf and Beach Resort in Casco.

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