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Fourth was full of fun, patriotism

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Parties, picnics and patriotism were the rule Monday, as Pinellas County residents celebrated Independence Day. Thousands used the holiday to relax, reflect and just have fun.

Some people received a patriotic surprise early Monday.

“I woke up this morning, went to get the paper, and there was a cute little flag,” said Terry Lea Hankins, who lives in St. Petersburg’s Old Northeast section.

“There was one for everybody on the end of the sidewalk. I thought, ‘Who’s the flag fairy?’”

A lot of people asked the same question, as more than a dozen neighborhoods found two-foot-tall American flags in their yards.

“I just want to say thank you” to whoever placed the flags, Miss Hankins said. “I think it’s very patriotic, and we need that right now,” she said.

Coldwell-Banker realty company was the gift-giver. “It was meant as a Fourth of July gesture,” said John McLaughlin, manager of the company’s Fourth Street office.

Between 4:30 and 6 a.m. Monday, real estate agents placed 25,000 flags in randomly selected neighborhoods in St. Petersburg, Tampa, New Port Richey, Clearwater and other cities, he said. “We’re glad everybody liked it,” McLaughlin said.

Hundreds of people crowded St. Petersburg’s waterfront for the Skyblast celebration, which included food, a craft show, jazz festival and a nighttime fireworks show.

One of the day’s events was an inner-tube regatta, with contestants racing their makeshift crafts across the Vinoy Basin.

Artistic talent was displayed at the Treasure Island beach, where people celebrated the Fourth by sand sculpting and body painting as part of the city’s all-day Pirate Days Celebration. Other events included a treasure hunt and pirate invasion, all leading to a fireworks display at 9 p.m.

Curt Heaps sprayed water on his detailed sculpture of a woman lying in the sand.

Tom Weir of Treasure Island took the latest movie craze and turned it upside down. His Dirty Dancing sand sculpture featured the legs of three couples, packed into blue jeans and dancing upside down.

Desa Aslanovich admired the sculptures. The Yugoslavia native said Independence Day is one of her favorite holidays.

“I think this is just great,” she said, gesturing around the beach. “This is a wonderful country that we live in. I’m very proud to be an American.”

Monday was mostly peaceful, with police and fire departments in South Pinellas County reporting few problems by mid-afternoon.

“We’ve had a couple of fireworks calls, but I think that’s going the way of Halloween” with fewer people participating, he said.

Some people celebrated the holiday in less traditional ways, including golfing and shopping.

“Those of us who are addicted to golf would probably play on Christmas Day,” said Helen Green as she prepared for a golf tournament at the Pasadena Yacht and Country Club in Gulfport. She made one concession to the day - she wore a blue-and-white-striped shirt with red shorts.

Mrs. Green, who described herself as “a relatively new player, said she decided to spend the holiday playing golf because “you can do it with friends, and it’s not safe traveling great distances.” A cookout was planned after the tournament, she said.

Stan Robinson spent part of his day roaming Pinellas Square Mall. “Every Fourth I spend birthday shopping,” he explained. His wife’s birthday is July 5, and Robinson said he never decides what to buy until the last minute.

COLOR PHOTO, V. Jane Windsor; BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO, Maurice Rivenbark; Fourth of July: 88; Flags: 88; Caption: Inner tube regatta begins at St. Petersburg’s downtown waterfront; Leon Nettles holds flag as he rides bike

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