

NEWS

City goes 4th on a festive day

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987 words

5 July 1989

Chicago Sun-Times

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FIVE STAR SPORTS FINAL

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Chicagoans celebrated the Fourth of July by waving the flag, sampling from the country's bounty and listening to patriotic speeches on a hot, sunny day made for celebrating.

People crowded parks and beaches as the air filled with smoke from roaring fireworks, sizzling grills and even a burning flag. While everyone celebrated the country's Declaration of Independence, some 900 homeless and poor people feasted.

The U.S. flag waved on thousands of lawns in Lincoln Park, a thank-you from a son of immigrants who came here for a better life.

The flags were planted early in the morning by Ted Kamberos, a North Side real estate agent, and his friends.

"I'm grateful to the country and to my neighbors," he said. "It's a way of saying thank you for my parents."

The 12-by-18-inch flags cost Kamberos about \$700. He plans to continue planting them "every year as long as I'm able," he said.

"It's coincidental that this came with all the hoopla over the Supreme Court decision on the flag," he said.

Despite the recent high court ruling that burning a flag in protest is not unconstitutional, Kamberos said he had heard of no one burning one of his flags.

On a grassy slope between Lake Shore Drive and Diversey Harbor, a theater group called Rococo Rodeo burned an American flag to "celebrate" the right to do so. There were about 10 in the theater group, 15 news media people and a couple of passersby.

The burning was meant "to celebrate our freedom of dissent without it being a protest against anything," said Patrick Cannon, 28.

A flag was hung on a line between two trees and doused with charcoal lighter fluid. As rock star Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A." blared from a tape player, the performers put on masks depicting members of the '60s pop group the Monkees, lit the flag and danced around it.

At first the breeze kept blowing out their matches, but then they used so much lighter fluid that the stunt was over in seconds.

Tom and Debbie Corcoran invited more than a hundred thousand people to their wedding anniversary for the Fourth .

"I've always liked big parties," Debbie said, at the Sharko's restaurant booth at Taste of Chicago. "We're going to serve champagne and corn."

The Fourth of July was their 10th wedding anniversary and the fifth celebration for her brother, George Sharko, and his wife, Jami. The Taste staff gave a gift basket to the busy couple.

The couple didn't always work on the Fourth. The Fourth and Memorial Day are the only days the restaurant is closed, so that was when family events were held.

Unlike the other booths, Sharko's sells only one item - buttery Florida sweet corn, some 45,000 ears of it.

Attendance Monday night for the fireworks and concert was estimated at 1.4 million people, and the total for the day was 2.67 million.

Tuesday totals broke last year's figures for the entire Taste, when more than 2.8 million people spent \$9.4 million in 10 days and gave the city a \$700,000 profit.

This year's Taste drew 2.8 million people in only eight days, said Margaret Jones, director of publicity for the Mayor's Office of Special Events. She said last year's total of \$9.4 million was surpassed at 3 p.m. Tuesday.

The lines were long and the ticket takers busy Tuesday. Butch McGuire's passed out more than 280 gallons of pickles during the first six days. Robinson's Ribs sold more than nine tons of spicy pork. Cookiemania sold more than 10,000 brownies.

While visitors ate and spent more during the eight-day event, they also left 586 tons of trash around Grant Park.

While thousands were dining on restaurant delectables in Grant Park, the Alternate Taste of Chicago was cooking on the Near West Side.

"It's good food, and the people are good," said a man named Clement, who was busy with a plateful of chicken, pasta and

vegetables.

Clement was among the 800 to 900 homeless and poor who turned out for free food and music at the Chicago Christian Industrial League at Halsted and Monroe. He said he hadn't eaten for a while and slept in a doorway Monday night.

"We consider this the real Taste," said Rick Roberts, executive director of the league. "It's not just a free meal. We are a big family."

The League served Italian and Polish sausage, Greek lamb, pasta, Cajun chicken and old favorites such as hot dogs.

"Hopefully these people will come back," Roberts said. "We aren't going to forget about them."

What would the Fourth of July be without politicians working crowds? U.S. Rep. Gus Savage (D-Ill.) created his own crowd of more than 10,000 during his 11th annual Family Day picnic in Riverdale.

People stood in a line the length of a football field for free ribs, chicken and potato salad, said Savage. "This is a day for the people," Savage said.

Savage sent out postcards paid for by the government to advertise the event. The card said Savage would speak about child care, health care and the savings and loan crisis. He did, to about 5,000 people, with a choir behind him and Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.) at his side.

John Gilardi contributed to this story.

Thousands celebrate Independence Day Tuesday by eating their way through the last day of Taste of Chicago. Michael Coe, 3, takes the more traditional route, dressing in a red, white and blue clown suit, grabbing his tiny Old Glory and peddling along with the Arlington Heights Fourth of July Parade.; Credit: Jon Sall

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