

A NEWS

Texans celebrate holiday with parades, Willie's picnic

Associated Press
708 words
5 July 1995
Houston Chronicle
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English

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Gov. George W. Bush was grand marshal of a parade in Arlington, and Willie Nelson took the stage in Luckenbach as Texans celebrated Independence Day in Lone Star style Tuesday.

Nelson sang his classic "'On the Road Again'" before a crowd gathered in the central Texas town of Luckenbach, population 3. The 25-act show marks the first time Nelson has held his more-or-less annual picnic at the hamlet.

"'It was a natural," Nelson said. "'I'm not sure why we didn't come here before, because Luckenbach and the Fourth of July picnic are sort of like cake and ice cream. They really go good together.'"

Kevin Kline, manager of the Exxon station in downtown Luckenbach, said the event was some cause for worry.

"'It's a little town and some of the residents were concerned (about the crowds), but I think they're doing a good job patrolling it,'" he said.

"'There's a lot of people going through. Yesterday and today have been our two busiest days of the year,'" Kline said. He had to work during the concert, but said he'd get off to see the fireworks display Tuesday night.

In Arlington, Bush rode in the back of a flag-bedecked white pickup truck as the parade wined through town. Meanwhile, Texans across the state marked the holiday with marching bands, watermelon seed-spitting contests and concerts.

In San Antonio, some 27,500 volunteers worked on projects at the National Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Youth Gathering, a national event that takes place every three years. In one project, attendees were building a house inside the San Antonio Convention Center for donation to a needy family.

Robert Warren, an 18-year-old from Lapeer, Mich., said his volunteer work likely would keep him from celebrating the holiday, although he said he might later go dancing. Warren was working with fellow Lapeer volunteer Lisa Cline, 16, who was making care packages from donated items, including toiletries and baby-care products.

"'There's a lot of less fortunate people out there that need it, and if there's anything I can do to help make them feel better about themselves and who they are, then I'll be more than happy to do it,'" Cline said.

Real estate agents placed small American flags in front of homes in Dallas. But North Texans were worried that high winds might scuttle fireworks shows Tuesday night. Officials in Carrollton postponed their Monday night fireworks and rescheduled for tonight.

Gusty winds forced officials to halt a planned fireworks display at Lake Ray Hubbard east of Dallas.

Small-craft warnings were in effect on many North Texas lakes because of high winds. The winds also fanned numerous grass fires in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, most believed started by fireworks.

Elsewhere in the state, rain fell in the Houston area Tuesday morning, but that wasn't stopping the Houston Freedom Fest in downtown, which in past years has been the largest Fourth of July celebration in the country.

Meanwhile, some workers from Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio, which has been targeted for shutdown by the government, were not very enthusiastic about their nation's birthday this year.

"'Usually, for a national holiday like the Fourth or Memorial Day, I wear a white shirt which has a flag on it. I haven't worn it yet for the Fourth,'" said Lydia Ponce, a civilian worker for 23 years at the base. "'I'm not less patriotic -- I love this country very much. I just can't seem to get into it.'"

Politicians -- another traditional Fourth of July fixture -- also were evident. Republican Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas spent the day in New Hampshire campaigning for president. Democrat John Odam, who later this month plans to formally announce his candidacy for the Senate seat now held by Gramm, was campaigning in Waco.

Photos: 1. Willie Nelson sings and Johnny Gimble plays the fiddle on Tuesday at Nelson's picnic in Luckenbach; 2. Gov. George W. Bush salutes as he passes the reviewing stand at a July Fourth parade in Arlington on Tuesday; Credit: All by Associated Press

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