

## **Ouellette: Best fireworks ever at Festival 2007**

### **Cara Spilsbury**

America turns 231 this July 4, and Haverhill has a pre-birthday bash like none other planned.

Festival 2007 will take place from 6 to 10 p.m. on Tuesday, July 3 at Haverhill Stadium.

Fireworks will be exploding above the city at 10 p.m., a spectacle that organizer Vinny Ouellette, Haverhill's director of human services, said will impress the thousands that usually turn out to watch because with the help of a generous, anonymous donation, the city spent \$20,000 on fireworks this year.

"This promises to be the biggest display ever," Ouellette said.

Admission to the festival is just \$1 per person. For seniors and children in strollers, admission is free. Rain date is July 5.

In addition to the traditional fireworks, the festival will feature a moon bounce, obstacle courses, face painting and live music.

The party kicks off with a disc jockey from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Children's singer Brownie McIntosh will entertain from 7:30 to 8 p.m., sponsored by **Merrimack Valley Hospital**. Finally, cover band Air Tight will bring its pop and rock renditions to the stage from 8 to 10 p.m.

The festival will also have vendors peddling carnival delicacies like hot dogs, sausage, fried dough, ice cream and slush.

"It's a really nice family event," said Ouellette. "They can bring their blankets, listen to some music and watch the fireworks. It's a nice open space for kids to run around and have a good time. It's a nice simple event, and I think people really enjoy that."

The festival at Haverhill Stadium usually draws around 3,000 people eager to celebrate. This year, Ouellette estimates 10,000 to 15,000 throughout the city will watch the fireworks display, including those watching from boats in the river and from porches, hills and lawns as the dynamic explosions touch off from Riverside Park.

The festival was once a three-day event, but is now held only on July 3 because it became difficult to get volunteer help on the holiday itself. It also became easier to book fireworks displays on July 3 because companies tend to book bigger events on July 4, plus having the citywide celebration on July 3 allows a planned rain date for the day after the holiday.

This year's festival was organized by Ouellette and the small staff in his office. Ouellette said the festival is "always in the back of my mind," but that the majority of the planning occurs during April and May. By the end of June, he's tweaking the final touches.

But those orchestrating the festival still get to enjoy the fruits of their own labor.

"I really enjoy the music, and I look forward to the fireworks every year," Ouellette said. "It's really enjoyable. Of course, the first three hours I'm running around like a madman, but then I get to sit down and enjoy the fireworks. For me, because I'm usually behind the crowd, I get to see everyone having a good time. It's a neat perspective, getting to see it all."