

Columns

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Thoughts as nation's 233rd birthday nears

BY LARRY KESSLER
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It was great to see thousands of people crowd downtown Attleboro for the first of what is anticipated to be an annual event, the Expo for the Senses, on Saturday. When the Wednesday Night Markets started going downhill, at the same time that downtown was beginning to resemble a ghost town due to the rise in empty storefronts, it became clear that if the market or anything similar were going to return, it had to be in a once-a-season format.

Other communities have been successful with this format - notably North Attleboro, with its annual downtown Block Party and Beach Volleyball night (scheduled for Tuesday, July 28 this year, with Thursday, July 30 the rain date) and Mansfield, with its annual Family Fun night (Tuesday, July 14, with Wednesday, July 15 the rain date) - that brings thousands of people to downtowns, and it was good to see Attleboro succeed.

As someone who vividly remembers the crowning event of the city's Tricentennial celebration in 1994, the Birthday Bash, which also drew thousands to the downtown, it was heartwarming to see the Expo for the Senses attract upwards of 10,000 people. Kudos to Mayor Kevin Dumas, Mim Fawcett of the Attleboro Arts Museum, Nancy Young of the Attleboro Jewelry Makers Outlet, and all of the committee members, whose hard work led to the event's success.

Special thanks to the vendors and the restaurants for having enough faith in the idea to commit resources and staff. The restaurants are especially the key, because veteran Wednesday Night Market-goers recall only too well that the old market really hit the skids when the food vendors and restaurants were reduced to a bare minimum, compared to the market's heyday. Here's hoping that the organizers can pull off an equally successfully Second Annual Expo for the Senses in 2010.

Here are some other pre-July 4th thoughts:

Even though July 4th has sadly turned into another shopping day (although this year, the economy needs all the help it can get), please take time to reflect on all of the freedoms and opportunities that this country offers. As the May 16 immigration event at the Attleboro Arts Museum and the recent GED graduation at Bristol Community College showed, people are still coming here to carve out new lives. That is never easy to do, but it's especially difficult during a recession, and it's a powerful statement on the country's potential to see people still willing to make the sacrifices to live here. Congratulations to the Arc of Northern Bristol County on celebrating its 50th anniversary last week. The group's leaders and members are to be commended for reaching that milestone, and for making a real difference in thousands of people's lives.

Congratulations, too, to Attleboro Recreation Director Dennis Walsh for continuing

the tradition he started a few years back, the "Kidz 4th Fun Event" at the Poncin-Hewitt Recreation Complex off Oakhill Avenue. Not only is the day enjoyable for the city's youngsters, but Walsh has turned it into good, solid family entertainment, as the photos from the event published in The Sun Chronicle the last few years have illustrated. Walsh's revival of the day, which is an updated version of old-time Fourth of July activities run by the city, is one more example of Walsh leading with a keen sense of compassion - and fun - two qualities all too often absent in the typical bureaucrats who run government agencies. Walsh, thankfully, is an atypical leader in that he actually enjoys serving the public.

If you're traveling over the Fourth of July weekend, drive carefully, cautiously and obey the rules of the road, which so many people refuse to even acknowledge, let alone obey. Besides encountering a plethora of drivers who don't obey speed limits on side roads, I had a new experience the other day when I was honked at by a driver in an SUV for stopping at the red light on Newport Avenue (Route 123) at Old Post Road, which is a dangerous intersection. The selfishness and meanness of the state's drivers never cease to amaze me.

Last, but not least, just be thankful for the little things in life this Fourth of July weekend. Independence Day is not Thanksgiving, but it is a time to be grateful for our jobs (especially in this day and age) our health, our spouses, our kids, our families and their health.

May you all have a safe, and peaceful, Fourth, and manage to supply the sunshine that we've all been so sorely lacking these days.

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