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Beacon Field fireworks worth traveling for

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GREENFIELD — For Cole Wickman, the annual fireworks display in Greenfield is one that is simply not to be missed and he was dead-set on making it to this year's show — even if it meant traveling 1,600 miles from his home in Yukon, Okla. to do it.

Wickman, who grew up in Franklin County, was even more determined to get the best spot possible on Beacon Field: just to the right of second base and directly in front of Poet's Seat Tower, where the fireworks would be launched. The feat required Wickman and his family to stake out the spot and set up long before anyone else: He'd been there since 11:30 in the morning.

"They were already here when we arrived and start setting up," said Christy Moore, the recreation department director. "Right in the middle of the field, and they've been there ever since."

Wickman said he moved to Oklahoma five years ago and got married soon after. He said that none of the fireworks displays in Oklahoma came anywhere close to the ones he remembers seeing in Greenfield, so he decided this would be the year that he brought his new wife up to visit family and experience the display.

"I've been bragging about it for years," Wickman said. "Growing up as a kid and then into adulthood, it just kind of became tradition."

Wickman's sister, Lillian Rush of Shelburne Falls, said that some of her and her brother's best memories were of watching the fireworks each year on Independence Day weekend, which factored in to their decision to make a day out of the event.

“He was determined to get the middle of the field,” Rush said. “We got here, and there was no one else here so we just started setting up. I told all of my friends, ‘Here’s the day, he’ll be here.’ We’ve had people stopping by all day to see him.”

Behind Wickman and his relatives, similar scenes were cropping up all over the field, if not quite as early. Parents spread out blankets and unfolded chairs, while their children played games of tag, devoured plates of fried dough or slurped down tropical smoothies.

Local bands took to a stage protruding from a parked Ryder truck to entertain the revelers. Tucker Connelly, 22, of Greenfield serenaded the crowd with an acoustic set, while Wild Bill and the Flying Sparks gave an energetic country-style performance. Other performers included the Zydeco Connection and the Greenfield Military Band.

“We only come every couple years, and this seemed like a good year,” said Shelly Pelletier of Greenfield, as her son Jacob tapped away at his Nintendo DS game system from the comfort of a picnic blanket. “We usually spend some time here having fun, and then because of the traffic we usually go home and watch the show from there.”

Jacob said his favorite part of the whole event was the food, noting that he was partial to the pretzels and fried dough.

Another attendee, Donna Lefko, was at the event with her grandsons, Dylan and Brody Wood, and a group of their friends. She said she had been bringing them to the display ever since they were born.

“It’s just that the kids love it, and it’s got to be the best fireworks I’ve ever seen,” Lefko said.

Her grandsons and their friends took advantage of a momentary break in the conversation to rattle off an exhaustive list of their favorite things about the event.

“I like the fireworks. I like the blue ones and I love the green ones, they’re just so great,” said Max Callahan, one of the boy’s friends.

Another, Isabel Pachecho, said she liked that nobody who came to the event ever seemed to cause any problems. “I like how so many people come out to support the Fourth of July. It’s a good crowd and they’re very supportive.”

Peter and Sandra Hunsicker of Greenfield said they had been attending the event for the past 30 years.

“We like the atmosphere, and there’s a lot of people that we know here who we haven’t seen for a while,” Peter said. “We like to listen to the music, and we especially like that we can watch the fireworks when they launch them right over the tower.”

And among the hundreds of area residents who had come out to the festivities with similar intentions, the mood was much the same. As the sun slowly crept below the horizon at their backs, what else was there to do besides wait for the rockets' red glare?

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Á Left - Avery Hoynash, 3, of Gardner takes a look at her newly painted face during Greenfield's Independence Day celebration at Beacon Field on Saturday. Recorder/Micky Bedell

Á Right - Arielle Wickman, Tricia Torrey, Jason Torrey, Cole Wickman and Caitlin Sullivan share a laugh on Beacon Field in Greenfield on Saturday, staking out a good location to watch the nighttime fireworks. Cole Wickman, who now lives in Oklahoma and came back to the area for the celebration, had been at Beacon Field since the late morning. Recorder/Micky Bedell

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