

07.07.2024 FEATURED STORY

Lighting up the sky for Shelter Island: Fireworks next Saturday brings Islanders together

By Ambrose Clancy



(Credit: Reporter File Photo)

For the two little girls, Catherine (Cat) Brigham and Carla Cadzin, the great communal celebration at midsummer on Shelter Island was something to look forward to, and when it was over, something to keep the memory alive until the following evening gathering in July at Crescent Beach.

For Ms. Brigham, the booming fireworks show over the bay celebrating America's independence, was thrilling, but there was something else, something deeper that she experienced as a little girl, and still does.

"Seeing so many people, all together in one place, for a small Island, that was and is just so rare," said Ms. Brigham, the president of the board for the past three years of the nonprofit Shelter Island Fireworks, Inc. "When I was little, walking up the hill, or seeing the fireworks from a boat, or as a teenager on the beach with friends, there was always a great feeling of connection," she said, adding that the walk to the Tuck Shop after the extravaganza gave a creamy topping to a perfect July day.

The Shelter Island Fireworks is different, she said, because of the communal spirit of the event, when families, friends and visitors all make that connection. There's an atmosphere of ease and fun that attracts visitors, Ms. Brigham said, noting that Scott Cooper, the Fireworks board's liaison to Grucci, which stages the show, always makes it a point to attend the Island's show with his family.

Ms. Cadzin, one of the original founders and members of the Fireworks board — which kept the tradition alive nine years ago when there was a possibility it would sunset forever — agreed that the unique Island show not only brings out Island families and friends every year, but some visitors plan their vacations to the Island around the event.

Her family moved to the Island when she was 10, and she immediately fell in love with "the magical" show. And like Ms. Brigham, it wasn't just the spectacle of light and sound floating, exploding and sounding high over the water on a warm July night, but the realization that "the whole Island is there. We're all together."

This year the show goes on Saturday, July 13, 9 to 10 p.m. at Crescent Beach, rain date Sunday, July 14. To support the 2024 Shelter Island Fireworks, make a donation by going to ShelterIslandFireworks.com and click "Donate," or you can mail a check to Shelter Island Fireworks, Inc. PO Box 452, Shelter Island, NY 11964.

Ms. Brigham noted that all parts of the Town's government is heavily involved, with Police, Fire and Highway departments, along with the Emergency Medical Services all pitching in, and many volunteers making the evening a success.



(Credit: Eleanor P. Labrozzi)

SAVING THE DAY

1957 was the year the Soviet Union launched the first satellite, Sputnik 1, into space; Elvis Presley bought a mansion in Memphis and named it Graceland; and Shelter Island residents were enjoying the first fireworks show in the skies over the dark blue of the nighttime bay.

Learning in 2015 that the Island's Chamber of Commerce could no longer fund the fireworks show, Ms. Cadzin, along with Kelly and Brett Surerus, and James Richardson, put their heads together to save the event. "There was a lot of group texting," Ms. Cadzin said, and a GoFundMe page was soon up and running, raising \$25,000 dollars in just a few months so the show could go on.

Since then, the fireworks have been community supported.

The organization that saved the show in 2015 relies completely on donations to sustain this beloved annual ritual. When the original board decided to take action, members of the group felt it was important that new traditions be created.

The organization now puts together programming and events both before and after the fireworks show in order to bring in the needed funds, and there is a long list of Island businesses who help sponsor these events.



The expression says it all — Grant Tesser on Crescent Beach Saturday night. (Credit: Lauren Tesser)

IT HAS TO BE GRUCCI

Fireworks by Grucci is back again this year to light up the night sky, and is promising to create a "bigger and better" finale for spectators on Shelter Island.

For many years, Jim Messer was in spectator of the show from the Shelter Island Country Club, and was done by Legion Fireworks from Wappinger Falls, N.Y.

Fireworks by Grucci was founded in 1850 by the Grucci family, which has been nicknamed "America's First Family of Fireworks." The sixth generation owned and operated family company is now an international entity and well-renowned for its exciting shows and personalized styles.

In addition to the annual Shelter Island show, Grucci has provided its services for multiple presidential inaugurations, as well as other high-profile events in New York City, Las Vegas and abroad.

BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME

For those two little Island girls, now grown, this year's show will provide another special evening. Ms. Cadzin said she's four months pregnant and her newcomer-on-the-way to the family will be with her on the beach. For Ms. Cadzin, it's an anniversary to celebrate. At the 2017 fireworks show, her husband, Mark Keerans proposed.

"Of course, everyone on the beach knew except me" she said. Then added with a smile, "Shelter Island, right?"

(Credit: David Brush)

Ambrose Clancy has been the editor of the Shelter Island Reporter since 2012. He's worked as a staff reporter for The North Shore Sun, the Southampton Press and was associate editor of the Riverhead News-Review and an editor at Long Island Business News.

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