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DEER ISLE

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The Island celebrates the Fourth with festivities and flamingos

by Clark Tate

There is a sea breeze on Main Street. The sun is hot and the sky clear. A band plays while a parade dances down shady streets lined with what seems like everyone in town. The Fourth of July parade in Deer Isle celebrated another summer in America on Monday.

Local hair stylist Suzy Shepard served as Master of Ceremonies and the Grand Marshal was recently retired UPS driver and local celebrity Jimmy Cook.

Hundreds of people stood along the parade route and dozens lounged on the grassy rise by the band, overlooking the judging stand where Shepard introduced each float as it turned the corner of Bridge Street and Route 15.



The Honor guard leads the parade.

Photo by Cindy Theilen

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Shepard's double pink tropical flamingo headband announced the nature-centered theme. "We try to pick a theme that everybody can participate in," said Shepard. "So you'll see flamingos throughout the island, I'm sure. Along with, of course, our American flags." When it comes to this year's parade turnout, she's proud. "I think it went marvelous, just marvelous," Shepard said. A lot of people wore their pink."

Shepard's rapport with participants is a highlight for longtime parade attendee Doug Tilton of Warren Point and Portsmouth, N.H. "I've pretty much never missed the parade," he said. "I just like when Suzy Shepard's up there and she's saying, 'I knew you'd be in the parade today, I saw you washing that car.' Or today, when she said to Vern, 'I thought you were bringing the pickup truck,'" said Tilton. "The whole community gets really involved."

"Freedom is more than choice," said Tilton when asked to define it. "I feel freer when everybody's free... And a day like this, I just look around and it seems like we're all just out here celebrating freedom and liberty and America. So it's nice."

When other attendees reflected on the meaning of freedom, they thought of Ukraine. "It's great to be in a free country. You think about other places like Ukraine," said Shepard. "They don't deserve to be in the situation that they're in."

Joyce Dunn of Deer Isle found the parade to be "fabulous!" (Though she was disappointed that Jimmy Cook didn't show up in feathers as he had hinted.) But she was also thinking of the embattled European nation. When asked what freedom means to her, Dunn responded with emotion, "Do you see that I have my Ukrainian necklace on?" To her, freedom is "priceless."

Jim Foley, Assistant Chief of the Deer Isle Fire Department, has been directing traffic for the Independence Day Parade "for the past 25 years or something." He likes the work. "It's great to see all the faces, you know? It's the same people every year," he said.

This year, though, Foley is reflecting on how freedom may be changing in America. "I want it to get back to how it used to be when people were free to go where they wanted to go and free to do whatever they wanted. And you know, the veterans fought real hard, all these years to give us freedom, and that should be exercised," said Foley.

“I think the federal judges have taken away a lot of freedoms to women,” said Foley. “Just the way things are heading right now, I find it upsetting.” He stopped to say, “Hi, Annie! Good seeing ya,” before continuing. “Yeah, but that’s what the Fourth of July is, it’s all about seeing people.”

Ann Hooke, a year-round Deer Isle resident, agreed. “I’m 82, right? I’ve seen a lot of July 4th parades. None of them compare. This is the best parade,” said Hooke. “Everybody’s laughing and having fun.”

Hooke flamingo-flapped and high-stepped in the parade with the Island Heritage Trust, complete with bright pink fabric wings. “I must say, given the current political situation, I was thrilled to have an excuse not to wear red, white or blue,” said Hooke. “I think a lot of us are feeling just, what’s gonna happen with our country?”

“Freedom means that we can have today, people of different colors, different ethnicities, different nationalities, walking together celebrating together, and celebrating freedom and rights all the stuff you know, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” said Hooke. “And again, with all the events going on in the country, one is just very aware that that’s all very fragile.”

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GALLERY — The Island celebrates the Fourth



The town band performs.
Photo by Cindy Theilen



The Honor guard leads the parade.
Photo by Cindy Theilen



Fireworks over Stonington Harbor.
Photo by Stephen Greenberg



The Island Peace and Justice sign says it all.
Photo by Cindy Theilen



Stonington Library Director Christopher Ross rides in a boat full of books.
Photo by Cindy Theilen



Grand Marshal Jimmy Cook waves to the crowd.
Photo by Cindy Theilen

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