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11,000 Fireworks being readied for Central PA 4th

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. -- Don't expect to say "ooh" every time a new shell paints the nighttime sky at the Central Pennsylvania 4th Fest — it would be physically impossible. With more than 11,000 shells being launched during the country's largest all-volunteer fireworks display, your best bet is to just sit back and enjoy the show, said Gary Mayhew, pyrotechnics chairman for the July 4 festival.

"This truly is a world-class fireworks display, right here in Central Pennsylvania," said Mayhew, whose year-round volunteer work for the festival has earned him the nickname "Dr. Boom." "We started planning for this year's show just one week after last year's so that we can incorporate the newest special effects, plus plenty of perennial crowd favorites."

Volunteers labor for hundreds of hours under the summer sun to stuff 6,200 mortar tubes with 11,000 aerial shells, ranging in size from 3 to 12 inches, all in a field near Penn State University's Beaver Stadium and Bryce Jordan Center. On Monday, July 4, computer software will detonate an average of 2.5 shells per second throughout the 39-minute, 21-second show, and an average of 47.5 shells per second during a "very voracious finale," according to Mayhew.

The 4th Fest uses more than 130 different types of shells to paint the sky with "chrysanthemums," "peonies" and "coconut palms" in a rainbow of colors. "Dr. Boom" advised viewers to watch for special-effects fireworks that draw smiley faces and other shapes high in the air.

The entire show is choreographed to patriotic songs, show tunes, movie soundtracks, and classic rock and country songs, all broadcast simultaneously on 93.7 The Bus radio and televised live on WJAC.

The celebration kicks off with the Firecracker 4K race in the morning, followed by a variety of children's activities, musical performances and refreshment vendors beginning at 4 p.m. Tickets for the VIP fireworks viewing area and VIP parking are on sale at the Bryce Jordan Center ticket office or by phone at (814) 865-5555.

Because general admission to the 4th Fest is free, the event's \$300,000 budget is supported entirely through individual and corporate donations. To make a contribution or for more information, call (814) 278-2782 or go to www.4thfest.org. Central Pennsylvania July 4th Inc. is a non-profit organization in its fourth year of operation.