

## Nebraska Geographic

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### **Independence Day – Nebraska Style**

Statewide, rockets red glare can be seen over Nebraska communities in celebration of Independence Day. Some towns have a barbecue meal followed by a fireworks display and call it good until next year. There is nothing wrong with that. Others celebrate with events all day or all weekend long. When it comes to Independence Day celebrations in Nebraska, one community rises above the smoky haze.

Seward first celebrated Independence Day in 1868. A Nebraska Historical Marker on the town square tells the story of Seward's patriotic history, including how Nebraska Governor Jim Exon designated the community as "Nebraska's Official 4<sup>th</sup> of July City" more than half a century ago. For 2024 the community is planning four days of events July 3-6. My favorite is always the Anvil Firing, rain or shine, bright and early at 7:30 a.m. on July 4. Talk about a boom!

Up in Norfolk, Big Bang Boom! – also known as Boomfest – draws visitors from far and wide to scenic Skyview Park. Visitors stake out their favorite parcel of green grass and wait for the annual show reflected on the tranquil waters of Skyview Lake. The pyrotechnic extravaganza, which will be synchronized with patriotic music on several area radio stations, is the culmination of a two-day celebration including the Wingfest Grill Competition, the Norfolk Area Rod & Custom Show N Shine, live music, food trucks, and much more.

The Waverlyfest in Waverly has all of the events that make an Independence Day celebration great. Of course there is a parade. There is also a pancake feed, an ice cream social, kids games, and sand volleyball. Here's a useful hint if you decide to go, when you see the Wavery Volunteer Fire Department trucks heading your way during the parade – be ready – they are locked and loaded with cold water and love cooling off the Fourth of July crowd.

One year I spent July 4 in Maui, Hawaii. The fireworks display was good, but the next morning, I was disgusted to see the ocean waves lapping at the trash from rocket tubes, firecracker paper, and other pyrotechnic amusements covering beach. If you're going to launch your patriotic pride into the sky for all to see, please pick up the papers, punks, cardboard tubes, and other trash when you're done. Don't leave that crap for someone else to pick up. When I see that trash still blowing around days later, I consider it a slap in the face to the people who fought and gave all for the freedom we should be celebrating.

OK, I am jumping off of my soapbox toward one more stellar Nebraska Independence Day celebration. The Murray Freedom Festival is a celebration of small-town family fun with a history dating back more than 50 years. Young Park on the west edge of Murray is the place to be on July 4. Excitement builds in anticipation of the announcement of the Grand Marshal and the coveted Miss Murray title. There will be a car show, a pancake breakfast, and a 5K run/walk. If you don't know what Oozeball is, be at the east side of the park at 10 a.m. to find out. Fireworks begin at 10 p.m.

Wherever you're celebrating Independence Day this year, I hope you'll take a moment to think about the freedom we enjoy in the United States, and the leadership and sacrifice that has been expended to preserve it as a shining example to the rest of the world for going on 250 years.

Safe travels – and watch for deer.