

TOWN NEWS

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Blazing Finale Will Cap Twain Days

By STEVEN GOODE
COURANT STAFF WRITER

Nice, friendly Twain Days are coming to Hartford this weekend with staid historical attractions, bouncy musical entertainment,

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quiet boat rides on the Connecticut River and laugh-a-minute pie-eating contests for kids.

But Wayne Derosiers is going to blow up tradition.

He's putting together "Twain's Electric Sky," a close-proximity laser and pyrotechnics show choreographed by self-described sky artist Pierre-Alain Hubert.

"It's in-your-face fireworks," said Derosiers, general manager of New Hampshire-based Atlas Advanced Pyrotechnics. "It's the best fireworks that we do."

The show, scheduled to start in Bushnell Park on Sunday at 9:30 p.m. and last about a half-hour, will involve smoke, lasers and several thousand shells in a variety of sizes. The key is that the largest shell will be 3 inches in diameter, allowing Hubert's vision and Derosiers' fireworks to explode seemingly right on top of and around the crowd, which is expected to number about 35,000.

Derosiers' company does more than 500 shows a year, including July Fourth celebrations in Boston and Washington, D.C., and Riverfest in Hartford. At the Twain show, he said, shells will be launched from five positions around the spectators. They will be launched from as close as 300 feet from the crowd — the closest state law allows — producing an intense effect. People are awestruck the first time they see such a show, he said.

Derosiers, who travels to China several times a year to keep up with the latest pyrotechnics trends, has some new twists this year, but they won't be revealed until Sunday night.

"I don't want to take away the thunder," he said.

That will also be supplied by Hubert, whose credits include helping light up the Eiffel Tower on New Year's Eve 1999, a Guinness Book of World Records display on the Great Wall of China and a birthday party for Mick Jagger in the south of France.

Hubert said he wanted to come back to the festival because he enjoyed making friends and becoming comfortable with the city last year. He also had some fresh ideas, which he declined to detail. But he did offer a hint.

"We have a little surprise," Hubert said. "Mark Twain will be speaking. It's going to be magic."

What is known for certain is that the permit for Twain's Electric Sky calls for more than 700 3-inch shells, 2,800 2-inch shells and dozens of other close-proximity fireworks.

Bill Abbott, fire marshal for the Hartford Fire Department, who has been involved with dozens of shows in the city, said Sunday's event doesn't compare with others such as Riverfest, which uses shells as large as 6 inches in diameter. But Abbott, who knows about some of Sunday's surprises, said that isn't necessarily a bad thing.

"After a while, how much boom and flash can you take?" Abbott asked. "There's a little something more to this."

Hartford's Mark Twain Days event is expected to attract about 75,000 visitors. It runs today from 7:30 to 11 p.m.; Saturday from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.; and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.