

# Fort Mackinac Hosts Music, Games, Picnic To Celebrate Freedom

By Sean Ely

Fort Mackinac helped celebrate the United States of America's 231 years of independence with the help of hundreds of guests who journeyed up the steep bluff for patriotic music, old-time games, a 38-gun salute, cannon firings, and a picnic.

July 4 on Mackinac was an American party, nonetheless because Fort Mackinac was built by British soldiers during the American Revolution.

"It's amazing to see everyone celebrating the fourth like this," said Colleen Alward of Grand Rapids, who was visiting the island with her husband and three children, Dane, Ciaran, and Patterson. "All the decorations are great, and it's nice with no cars, taking that step back in history. It means more than being in a bigger city. The picnics, the tablecloths, the people; it's all special. We could have had dinner in the dining room of the Grand Hotel, but we chose to come here, because everyone told us that the kids will just love it. If you went back 80 years, this is exactly what would be going on. It's genuine."

Back home, Mrs. Alward was asked by one of her friends, "What are you going to do for four days?" She knew the problem is trying to fit everything in while here, she said, as she watched her sons play catch with sticks and a hoop in an old-time game called "graces."

"This is literally in your backyard, and people don't realize that you don't have to go far to have a nice vacation," she said. "I told my husband that I want to come back again next year at the same time, because it's so much fun."

Music at Mackinac is a daily tradition on the Fort grounds, but on Independence Day, the interpreters kick it up a notch with patriotic music for the country. After that, a national salute honoring veterans, who stand in formation with the fort's soldiers as The Star-Spangled Banner is sung and the United States flag is raised. A 38-gun salute is fired, one



Interpreter Brett Yzquierdo (far left) and Trace Dominguez play drums and flute for an audience near the 1880s-model cannon, between shots over the harbor.

shot for every state in the union in the 1880s. One soldier would fire a shot into the air as each state was called out, but when it came time for Michigan, the words, "the great state of Michigan" were heard across the Fort grounds, sparking all the soldiers to fire at the same time as the crowd roared with applause.

"I've been to this twice today, because we do one in the afternoon," said Phil Porter, director of Mackinac State Historic Parks, "and I just can't think of a more appropriate place to be for the fourth of July than Fort Mackinac, which has so much American history connected with it, and the programming that we do just really draws the people in."

"They sing The Star-Spangled Banner, they listen to the patriotic music, they hear the national salute, and the whole thing is just so conducive to the spirit of the Fourth of July. It's one of my favorite things that we do," he said. "I get moved by it."

"To see the veterans come up, such as my dad, who fought in World War II and came to the front and stood there, that means a lot to him."

Karen Kaiser, a scout leader for Troop 3286 of Royal Oak, this week's honor guard, said her scouts have performed Fourth of July festivities at Fort

everything about all of this."

To conclude the celebration at Fort Mackinac, lead interpreter Joe Frost prepared the cannon with other soldiers, eager to blast off 10, 14, and then 16 ounces of gun powder. The normal cannon charge for the hourly firings is just four ounces.

"Firing off that much powder just gives me an adrenaline rush," Mr. Frost said. "The crowd was really great and it was a lot of fun. It is definitely my favorite activity, and I look forward to that all summer. Unfortunately, the Fourth of July is a great time, but it is a high-water mark, so-to-speak. The rest of the season is smooth sailing from here. We've been at this for two months now, so this is the two-month mark, meaning we have two more to go. That's pretty cool, it's a relief to get the Fourth done, but it's kind of sad at the same time. The summer is really going by quickly."

The other lead interpreter, Maria Spranger, enjoys the cannon firings just as much as Mr. Frost. She smiled from ear to ear after each blast.

"You can see the fire coming out of the barrel, and you can't with the normal ones," she said. "The reactions from people are



At right, Brian and Cheryl Ott of Kiel, Wisconsin, visit Fort Mackinac with their children, Elisa and Steven, on Wednesday, July 4. The family agreed the day was educational, and the buffet picnic was especially good. Steven's wood "click-clack" blocks are an "1880s Transformer," said his father. They form a table in this photograph.

Mackinac for many years.

"This is just a wonderful experience for the girls, and the history is great, and with all the people here, it's just all about the memories," she said. "They get to meet new people, learn the history of the places here, and have a lot of fun doing it. I love coming here. I could live here."

Chris and Kathy Pickering, who watched all of the activities at the Fort during the day, came to Mackinac for their honeymoon 25 years ago, and they came back for their anniversary.

"We wanted to come to the fort because of the whole military and historical part of the day," said Mrs. Pickering, a native of Green Bay. "We thought it would be fun; something else to do. We loved the buffet, and we love cycling around the Island. We just love

amazing. They'll see the firings early on in the day, and then the other ones later on in the evening, and they will just be shocked at the difference. I was telling a few people today about how big the charges were and their faces were priceless. Their mouths just dropped, and they said, 'Wow, that sounds awesome.' On the Fourth of July, kids are even more excited because they want to get out there and do something, and they know it's a holiday.

Everybody's spirits have been really, really high."

As the party ended at Fort Mackinac after the final cannon firing, the grounds cleared quickly in preparation for the fireworks that were going to be shot from the water near Windermere Point. The Fort cleared, and the streets filled with people, anticipating the colorful bursts.



## Island Gardens Are a Summer Highlight

Juan Garcia waters the flower garden near the east entrance of Grand Hotel Wednesday, July 4. The hotel gardens draw the attention of Island visitors and residents throughout the season.