

Biggest fireworks show New Brunswick has ever seen promised for Thursday

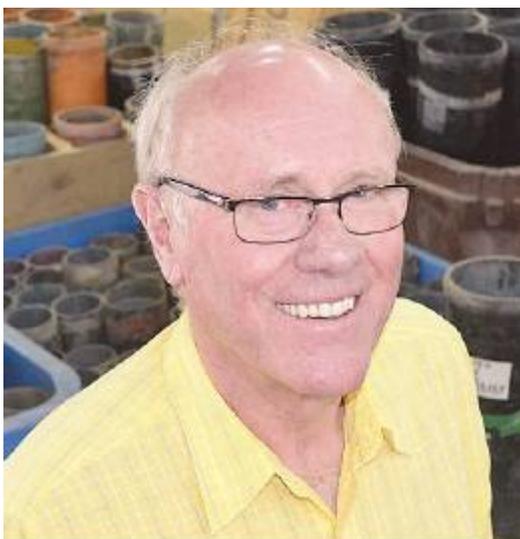
SARAH SEELEY TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



An example of a Graham Fireworks show in Saint John. PHOTO: RYAN LAVIGNE

SAINT JOHN • If Saint Johners look into the sky on Thursday night, they will be left with a sight to leave them speechless.

Peter Graham and his team at Graham Fireworks have spent two months on a fireworks show that will last around 25 minutes. The display is part of the 150th anniversary celebrations for Moosehead Breweries, G.E.



Peter Graham PHOTO: SARAH SEELEY/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

Barbour Inc. and Source Atlantic.

Graham said the spectacle will be the biggest fireworks show New Brunswick has ever seen.

"The sky is going to be full," he said. "We've got to start off with a bang and in this show, we're kicking it harder and higher."

His warehouse is full of mortar tubes and boxes of fireworks. There are even fireworks from Spain and China that Graham has never seen before.

"I'm glad I've got a lot of favours stacked up in the system because we've called in every favour for this show."

When Graham was approached about organizing the show, he immediately started coming up with a plan. When designing the display, he said he takes colour co-ordination, balance, presentation and visual impact into account.

In the past, he has organized the fireworks for events like Area 506 and the Saint John Exhibition.

Graham and seven other members of his team are putting together the final touches of the show. They intended to spend most of Wednesday and Thursday setting up the fireworks on Long Wharf near the Hilton Hotel.

The mortars used to fire off the shells are placed in drums filled with sand. Barricades and a 40-foot sea container will protect the crew from the impact of the fireworks. There are also aquatic shells, which float on the water for several seconds and shoot into the sky.

There is a 1,500-foot zone around where the display is firing off. Graham has co-ordinated with the Saint John Port Authority to make sure no watercraft enters the area.

His crew will be wearing protective gear to shield them from the explosive fireworks. The outfit consists of a helmet, face shield, special clothing and earplugs.

"We've never had injury. We've had things blow and knock someone's helmet off but that's from the [fireworks] concussion mostly."

During the show, Graham said the different types of fireworks are scheduled to go off at precise intervals.

"It's like an orchestra playing."

The grand finale of the display is expected to last about 70 seconds, but during the minute, Graham said there will be about 2,500 individual visual impressions.

"It will leave them with a parting shot of a good night kiss."

Graham first dabbled with pyrotechnics in his Grade 9 chemistry class. He was told to put together enough materials for one pound of fireworks. Instead, he and his friends went to all the drug stores in Saint John's north end and got the supplies for 50 pounds. They lit the fireworks off on Halloween night.

"We didn't realize the impact of the stuff, so it really lit up St. Peter's ballpark," he said.

Graham learned more about fireworks through apprenticeships and training. His first show was the Nauwigewauk Fair and eventually, he moved on to larger shows like the Saint John Ex. Graham has also orchestrated displays for the Beach Boys and Queen Elizabeth II when she came to New Brunswick in 1984.

"We've done some really big shows," he said. "When you get that designation, then you have earned that respect."

He said he is honoured to put on the show for the three companies celebrating their sesquicentennial anniversary. The businesses are paying for the display to show their appreciation to the loyal Saint John customers.

"It's a gift to the city," said Graham.

The fireworks are scheduled to start at 9:30 p.m. on Long Wharf.