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often brings together a different crowd than the bigger fireworks in Florence. This year, Darlings was the site of a private party which required a wristband for entrance, but the fireworks were visible from numerous public locations around the lake.

On Sunday, Florence Habitat for Humanity led the activities for all ages at the Port of Siuslaw Boardwalk. This included a Bike Parade, pie and watermelon eating contests and kids games.

Habitat Board Member Aric Sneddon coordinated the first annual Independence Day Bike Parade.

“Habitat decided the community does so much for us that we wanted to do something for the community, and a parade is a fun way, especially with all the kids. They could decorate their bikes and families could have a chance to get creative,” Sneddon said. “We’re hoping it will be the first of many, and it’s one of the ways that Habitat can give back to the community that supports us without having to spend our donor



See more photos of the area’s Fourth of July celebrations on page 8A

dollars — it doesn’t really cost anything to do a parade, but it’s a brings a lot of fun. Plus, coming out of COVID, we knew that Florence was ready to do something.”

The parade route started at First and Hemlock streets, continued down to Bay Street through Historic Old Town and finished at the Boardwalk, where Habitat had games for the kids set up, as well as the watermelon and pie-eating contests.

“We were able to give our Future First Citizen, Jessica South, a parade to ride in because we didn’t have a Rhody Parade this year, so we invited her to come ride

with us as well. And we had Uncle Sam as the Grand Marshal,” Sneddon said.

In addition, 2019 Queen Rhododendra Madison Reynolds — the reigning Rhododendron Festival monarch due to COVID-19 — also presided over the parade.

At the Boardwalk, everyone between 5 to 105 were invited to showcase their eating competition skills. Registration began at 11 a.m. and over 40 children and adults participated to smother their faces in slices of watermelon and pie, using no hands.

Family and friends gathered around the white tables to cheer contestant



on, while snapping photos along the way. After each round, the sounds of clapping and laughter filled the lawn.

Kiwanis Club of Florence provided some of its lawn activities from the Rhody Kids Games, as well as putting American flags along Highway 101, around town and in Historic Old Town.

That evening, the chamber’s fireworks show came together at the Port of Siuslaw. The show’s producer, Western Display Fireworks, launched pyrotechnics from the port campground over the Siuslaw River.

This drew thousands of people who gathered in the early evening before the

display with blankets, chairs and ice-cream along Bay

Street, the Boardwalk, the port and across the river to watch the 30-minute show.

The sounds of beaming rockets set off laughter, whistling and cheers for all to hear. This was coupled with DJ Al Rojas, who provided music throughout the day at the Boardwalk.

People could be seen all weekend sporting red, white and blue and waving the American flag as they recreated in the area and visited Florence businesses.

It was a welcome return to Florence’s all-American Fourth of July.

Siuslaw Awards to celebrate innovation, resiliency, recovery

The phoenix bird of mythology symbolizes rebirth, second chances, harmony, peace and prosperity. That’s why the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce has chosen “Phoenix Rising” as this year’s theme for the annual Siuslaw Awards.

The public is invited to celebrate the Florence area’s business community rising from the ashes of the pandemic and taking flight with a semi-formal tropical dinner and awards presentation on Thursday, July 22, 5:30 to 8 p.m. at Three Rivers Casino Resort, 5647 Highway 126.

Doors will open at 5 p.m. for appetizers and beverages. The event includes full dinner, wine, live music, State of the Chamber

presentation, installation of new board members, retiring of outgoing board members, plus the fun and inspirational awards program. Tickets are just \$40 per person or \$320 per table of eight, and are available at the Chamber’s office, 290 Highway 101, or at florencechamber.com/event/siuslaw-awards-2-2-2/.

This prestigious event will recognize those who inspired others during the past 18 months. Come hear the stories of those businesses, nonprofits, civic groups and individuals that not only survived but thrived through hard work, creativity, collaboration and compassion.

Three Rivers Casino is the special event sponsor

and Christina Voogd, principal broker at Berkshire Hathaway Realty, is the wine sponsor. There are still sponsorships available for the room décor (\$500) and five remaining presentation tables available for \$50 each. Contact event coordinator Mitzi Hathaway at 541-997-3128, ext. 3, for details.

This event will be a true celebration of the business community’s innovation, endurance, bravery, and compassion.

Three of the traditional categories will carry over this year: the Stu Johnston Business of the Year Award, Future First Citizen Award and the Florence First Citizen Award.

Attendees will hear inspiring stories of businesses

that made the best out of a difficult situation and whose innovation led to inspiring others to do the same. There will be stories of business owners and employees who worked on the front lines providing basic needs so our community could stay safe; stories of caring individuals, organizations and groups of people who refused to give up and put the needs of the community above their own; and stories about how some brave souls were determined enough to start a business during a pandemic.

For more information, call Florence Area Chamber of Commerce at 541-997-3128, email Events@FlorenceChamber.com or visit FlorenceChamber.com.

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“We really had no problems at all. We were a little short of volunteers, but we had all of our staff on duty and everything went great. We had no major problems to speak of, and everyone seemed to be having a really good time,” he said. “It was a great event.”

The observations shared by Huntington were echoed by Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue Fire Marshal Tony Miller, who was on hand to observe and respond to any potential fire danger or emergency situation.

“This weekend was a prime example of all agencies involved — Florence Police Department, Port

of Siuslaw, Western Lane Ambulance District and Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue —coordinating and planning prior to our festivities. Working together and assisting each other shows how well choreographed these events can be,” he said. Despite reports of increased use of illegal fireworks, Miller saw the usage of these dangerous combustibles as less of a problem than in the past.

“As the fire marshal, I was pleased to see the use of illegal fireworks decreased from previous years within this community. There may have appeared to be a significant amount of illegal firework activity, but this could not be further from

the truth,” he said.

He also noted, “There were no major injuries reported by legal/illegal fireworks activity this year, for which we are all grateful.”

The lack of significant problems was also reported by Florence Police Commander John Pitcher.

“Overall, the weekend went really well,” he said. “A lot of people were in town, but all the events went well and we did not have any major incidents or problems.”

However, the holiday weekend had its share of alerts, including an accident further east on Highway 126 that stopped highway traffic at Veneta and a utility outage for Spectrum internet.

Join the Siuslaw Vision Team!

Our Team of passionate volunteer community builders is expanding and we need more voices from our Siuslaw communities.

- ~ Support people who are turning community dreams into reality
- ~ Help make connections and coordinate resources
- ~ Make the Siuslaw region a better place to live, work and play!

Learn More:
www.SiuslawVision.org/JoinTheVT
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Our mission is to unify and support all the arts, enrich cultural life and stimulate economic vitality in Florence.