



Scott N. Miller
smiller@vaildaily.com

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Avon fireworks show to kick off weekend



A selection of 5-inch mortar style fireworks are seen shortly before being loaded into separate and specific tubes Thursday for the Avon fireworks show at Harry A. Nottingham Park today. Paul Zoch, the man in charge of the Avon fireworks show since 2009, has chosen the Green Octopus, seen resting on top of the other shells, as his favorite for this year's show.

You need to know:

- Gates open at 5 p.m.
- No liquor, personal fireworks or pets are allowed.
- You can't park at Avon's rec center or town hall.
- The fireworks' soundtrack will be broadcast on KZYR 97.7.

More info: Go to www.avon.org.

AVON — Paul Zoch started in the fireworks business the way you'd expect — as a boy, lighting Fourth of July rockets and firecrackers with his dad. Today, Zoch runs one of the biggest fireworks shows in the state, Avon's annual Salute to the USA celebration.

That celebration is a tradition dating back nearly 30 years. Zoch has been involved in the show for the past 25. He started on the crew that was run by Vail Valley fireworks guru Jim Funk — who has since moved to Arizona. Zoch has run the show for the past seven years.

As you'd expect, Zoch has a full-time job, as the director of the engineering department at the Park Hyatt Beaver Creek. But this time of year, his time is well-occupied, not just by tonight's show in Avon, but for Saturday shows in Vail, Beaver Creek and Eagle. The Avon show, though, is the big, exploding enchilada, and it takes a lot of work to stage.

Starting in the months before the show, Zoch and his crew — all of whom work for Western Enterprises, which runs shows around the county — start gathering gear from previous shows around the mountains. The various mortars, firing boards and other gear is all checked over and repaired if needed.

The weekend before the show, the gear is loaded on trucks, which is just part of the heavy lifting involved in putting on a show with roughly 10,000 shells fired over nearly 30 minutes.

Setup takes a couple of long days by a crew of 14. More testing will be done the day of the show, in anticipation of lighting up the mountain sky about the time the stars are visible.

EVOLUTION OF THE SHOW

Over the years, both the Salute to the USA and the show itself have evolved.

This year's event is focused on the fireworks, so there won't be any live bands, or even DJs, in the park. Town of Avon Special Events Coordinator Danita Dempsey said research over the years indicates that the town could save money by not hiring bands. Instead, there's an expanded family zone on the north side of the park and a new area where adult beverages are available.

There will be fire jugglers and other performers in the park itself, as well as plenty of food, soft drink and merchandise vendors.

But even as the first shells shriek into the sky, it's unlikely people in the park will notice how fireworks shows have evolved over the years.

For more than 20 years, now, the fireworks have had a musical soundtrack. For several years, that soundtrack was prepared by local radio station KZYR. These days, the station broadcasts music prepared by Western Enterprises. This year, if you watch and listen closely, you'll see tighter coordination between the music and fireworks.

This year's broadcast will originate not from the KZYR studios in Edwards, but from the new stage at Nottingham Park. Dempsey said the short broadcast distance will send a signal more quickly to the firing computers, allowing better synchronization between the audio and visuals.

Computers have brought big changes to the fireworks business, Zoch said, especially when it comes to shows with thousands and thousands of shells.

And that's where safety comes in.

"As much as the technology has evolved, the safety has changed even more," Zoch said. "We go through annual training, and anything that's learned (at other shows) is shared. Seven out of our 14 technicians are certified. We have a very experienced team, and that makes the show go very well."

That's what you want when thousands of people are waiting to cheer.

Vail Daily Business Editor Scott Miller can be reached at 970-748-2930, smiller@vaildaily.com or @scottnmiller.

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