

Suches...from Page 1A

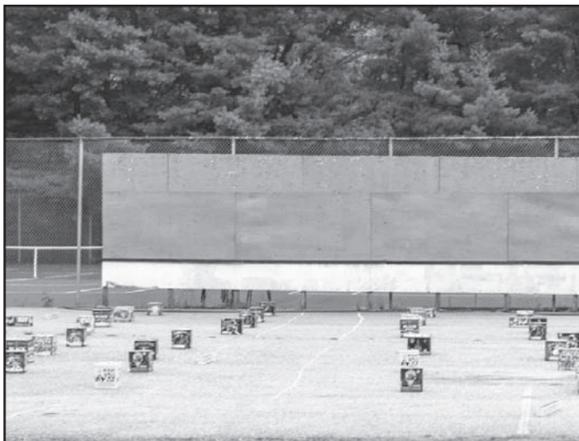
13-year-old singing sensation Nealy Webster took the stage to perform Lee Greenwood's 1984 hit "God Bless the USA."

Webster was followed by an Armed Forces Medley that included the official songs of the Army, Marines Corps, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard, after which Webster performed an energetic rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Within moments of Webster delivering the final line of the national anthem, fireworks blasted high into the blueish-purple sky as onlookers quickly found their seats to celebrate the country's birthday with family, friends, neighbors and fellow Americans.

Once again, the Valley Above the Clouds delivered a full 30 minutes of bright, colorful explosions with lots of "oohs" and "aahs" from young and old, locals and visitors alike.

The community of Suches continues to out-do itself each and every summer, especially considering its humble beginnings decades ago, when a few friends started lighting bottle rockets at the General Store.



Unlit fireworks lining the cement basketball courts in Suches as prepared by Fire Station No. 5. Photo by Todd Forrest

Every year since, the July Fourth spectacle continued to grow, with locals selling concessions on-site to raise money for the annual trip to Ducktown, Tennessee, to purchase fireworks.

The display has since moved to the school, and the fire department has taken over the responsibilities of handling and igniting the vast assortment of pyrotechnics.

Food and beverages are still available at a permanent concession stand that is also used during the annual Indian Summer Festival.

And from the looks of last week's crowds, it appears as if the reputation of this local phenomenon is flourishing more than ever, attracting more visitors to the secluded mountain community each and every Independence Day.



This year's Suches Fireworks drew bigger-than-ever crowds of patriotic spectators. Photo by Todd Forrest



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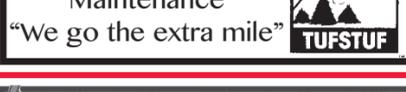
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