



# ORGANIZED CHAOS

to celebrate our country's independence



Just like I imagine the birth of our country, Havre de Grace celebrates July 4th with an event that brings thousands of folks to our city creating what may appear to be “organized chaos.” It’s a week-long event that includes a carnival, parade, concert and a grand finale of music and fireworks! We took some time to interview Carolyn Narvell, who was a long-term member of the Independence Celebration Committee, to learn more of the behind-the-scenes details of this event.

## Where to start?

First let me describe the scene. June 29 – July 3, 2011: The carnival offers the joy of rides for young and old—bumper cars are still one of the favorites, the smell of hot dogs, burgers and cotton candy, and games. Families from all around the area enjoy the carnival.

Then consider the perfect parade route—a straight, wide, tree-lined street slightly over a mile long that ends at Tydings Park overlooking the Chesapeake Bay! Fire engines, majorette/dance units, floats, color guards, marching bands, local organizations and dignitaries, clowns, racing vehicles, custom cars, equestrian units, and patriotic crowds. Porches with bunting draped over railings, excited children with little hands waving flags, family picnics, and old friends gathering for the day. Norman Rockwell would have loved Havre de Grace during our Independence Celebration week.

The finale is the concert and fireworks at the City Yacht Basin! It’s great fun that includes music and dancing while waiting for the fireworks. Plenty of blankets spread out around the park. Folks line up on the Promenade. It’s a beautiful site as the sun sets and you see the outline of the boats with their lights glowing all around the harbor. It’s a magical moment just before the fireworks begin.

Carolyn explains that it’s a small committee of nine that organizes this very popular community event. Charlie Mike is the present chairman. Over the years, they’ve actually developed an operating manual to be able to pass to others the steps to creating this successful event. The present committee took over the event in 1987 with their first parade in 1988. This year is their 23rd year organizing the event. In total, this is the 63rd year of celebrating our country’s independence in

this manner. Carolyn reminds us that before 1948 there was a Fireman’s Parade to celebrate July 4th and the only time there wasn’t a parade was during WWII.

Carolyn believes the marching bands are the ‘heart of the parade’ and shares the comment she hears most often from these groups, they love how “animated and wonderful the crowd is.” If you’ve been here, you’ve witnessed it. Bright-eyed children, cheers and clapping from the crowd, lots of standing—hats or hands over their hearts—to honor each and every honor guard that marches past, and plenty of firetrucks, floats and entertainment exciting the crowd.

Behind the scenes this group of nine coordinates a week of activities with the help of 30+ volunteers for the parade, the City of Havre de Grace Mayor and staff, police and DPW folks, Havre de Grace Ambulance Corps, harbor master, and Susquehanna Hose Company. Add to that the many sponsors, including WXCX again this year, the various local groups who help to keep the park clean and the Havre de Grace Lyons Club that moves among the parade crowd to accept donations for the event.

But there’s more. It begins with accepting applications and organizing the parade units. There is no registration fee. The 20-30 bands do receive an honorarium of \$650-\$3500, depending on distance and needs. The total cost for the parade bands is about \$40,000. There is also \$5,000 in prize money in various categories. The judges are from Harford Community College.

Some of the bands travel a great distance adding us to their scheduled July 4th events. The Philippine Heritage Band from Ontario, Canada, has participated for several years. This year,

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"The Herd" High School Marching Band and Drumline from Buffalo, Minnesota will bring a truck and 5 buses of band members to participate in the parade on their way to Fairfax, Va. They had heard we were a great place to march and many have commented about how well organized our parade is.

It's important to note that although some folks are disappointed that we rarely have the parade on the actual 4th of July, by creating the date as we do, these remarkable bands are able to fit us into their schedule. Local groups including high school bands, scouts, fire companies, etc. are able to participate because they don't have to be in 3 places at the same time on the actual 4th. This is how the committee is able to create our amazing parade with 100 units this year.

The carnival begins the week-long event and with the vendors brings approximately \$35,000 to help offset the Independence Celebration expenses. Each night the park is cleaned and made ready for the next day by volunteers.

The parade brings the same tasks. DPW cleaning trash cans within hours of the event. Firemen and HdG Ambulance Corp. ready for any emergency. Water and ice is made available. Golf carts have been donated for the day to make coordination easier. Cell phones make it simpler to stay on top of all the details of the day. This year's Grand Marshal will be Richard Hauf, highly respected Band Director for Havre de Grace High School.

At 7 pm. on Parade Day, there is a concert just below the carnival at the City Yacht Basin. This year the Harford County Showmobile will feature LIX—a very popular local group offering plenty of dance music for all ages. DJ Jeff Thompson will be Master of Ceremonies and will again prepare the music that is synchronized with the fireworks. The fireworks extravaganza costs about \$22,000.



Volunteers for the Parade Event receive t-shirts created by Dan McClure. They can be purchased for a mere \$5 at various locations including First Friday events, HdG Visitor Center, and on parade day. Each year is a new design. They are very popular and help to publicize this great family event.

It's difficult in this short article to give full accounting for this event. But it's well documented, has excellent bookkeeping procedures, and dozens of unseen tasks behind the scenes handled flawlessly. From sand being placed in the butt cans (cigarettes, that is), to signage, to keeping the parade line in order and traffic flowing, the various volunteers and City of Havre de Grace employees create a wonderful week for celebrating the Independence of our country.

This year the committee has a new website that we encourage you to visit. Their history, committee information, photos, sponsorship/donation opportunities, and latest news will be available, [www.HavredeGraceJuly4.org](http://www.HavredeGraceJuly4.org). Kudos to this committee and to the community of Havre de Grace for a wonderful celebration.

If you've not headed down to the City Yacht Basin for the carnival, concert and fireworks following the parade, it's a real treat! There's something wonderful that occurs with the excited crowd, music and dancing, the squeals of the folks enjoying the carnival, the lights, and, of course, the food! Add the music that plays while you watch the amazing fireworks, and then smile as you enjoy the ooooo's and aaaah's of the crowd. It's worth the patience needed to handle the crowd and the drive home. I'll see you there—waving my flag and taking photos!



[www.havredegracejuly4.org](http://www.havredegracejuly4.org) • [www.lixband.com](http://www.lixband.com)  
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