



# Western Pyrotechnic Association Newsletter

June/2005



President  
Russ Laurie

The life and times of being the WPA President. Let's see so far it's been great! after finding a new home for DO IT last year and having to deal with the sand and wind things went well, next was the rain storm from hell at this years PD at WWB. Now we had to find another new home this year for DO IT, hopefully this will be our home for good, don't know for sure. Now I'm moving from So Cal to Nor Cal, I would say that the last year or so have been every interesting !



Vice President  
Tom Calderwood

I hate bios. I really do. If you want to talk about the latest rocket technique, or how to get those really deep blues without any red flame fringing, or how either one of us became a WPA member, then catch me at the afterglows. Bios are interactive events, usually starting with the phrase: "You won't believe this, but..." AND also - thanks to all of our volunteers. You folks rock!



Secretary  
Rita Oesterle

#### Secretary's Musings

I had a great time at Winterblast. The help at registration was the best ever. The money taken in every day matched up with the records from the day. I enjoyed the afterglows more this year since I met more members. Thanks for being so nice at registration and for such wonderful friendships formed.



Treasurer  
Ann Huffman

While I loved cooking for the staff over the last few events, now I get to play with money!



Publications VP  
Tim Thompson

I started in the club in 2002 as just another thump junkie. After that, I became an area VP for San Diego and now I am on the BOD. Most of you know me as "Evil" Tim, but I





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## A Message From The Editor



This being my first newsletter as VP of Publications, I hope it is everything you have hoped and waited patiently for. I have tried to include articles of interest to everyone, as well as candid shots from events past and present. Any suggestions you may have for future newsletters are greatly appreciated. Please keep sending in those photos and articles! We are a large club of professionals, and to share your knowledge with others is one of the best ways for all of us to grow into something bigger and better than we already have become. This first newsletter took me some time to get out. There was a large learning curve, and I hope I have learned all of the little things that slowed me down the first time. Hopefully, the newsletters will come out much more timely in the future now that I know little things like what the printer wants, how he wants it, why he wants it that way etc.

## Current Active Membership Totals

Here they are in alphabetical order:

Alaska	5
CA Central	120
CA Northern Bay	92
CA San Joaquin	90
CA Southern	64
Canada	19
Eastern	106
Hawaii	4
Northwest	36
Rocky Mountains	59
Southwest	54
Texas	3



## WPA BOD Minutes April 21, 2005

Call to Order 8:14 pm

Conference Call attendees: Russ Laurie, Tom Calderwood, Rita Oesterle, Ann Huffman and Tim Thompson.

1. Approval of minutes from the general meeting at WWB 16 minutes were approved by the BOD.
2. The final approval of these minutes will be at the WPA general meeting held at WWB 17.

Motion by Tom Calderwood; Seconded by Tim Thompson

- a. Russ Laurie researched our BY LAWS to determine if a BOD member could also be an area VP. There is no mention as to any conflict; therefore, Tim Thompson is WPA San Diego area VP.
- b. The WPA Hawaii area VP position is open.

### 2. Treasurer's Report

Jan 1, 2005 thru March 31, 2005

Starting balance	\$ 32,556.18
Total Income	\$118,342.53
Total Expenses	\$ 78,521.63
Bank Balance	\$ 66,517.16

WWB and DO IT account for about 90% of our funds collected. Membership fees make up the Remaining funds. The membership fees are used to pay for the administrative fees including insurance (about \$38,000), taxes if incurred, newsletter publishing, etc. Ann Huffman will be sending in our taxes to our CPA on April 22, 2005.

WPA saved about \$12,000 by having all WWB 16 events at SARA PARK. The savings came from not having double payments for security, clean up and equipment rentals. Gate donations at the public displays were about \$6,000. The auction brought in \$7,000.

WWB 16 expenses were about \$2,000 over the budget. Detailed figures were not available. Russ said he would send Ann the budget sheet for WWB 16. Ann can then break out the actual expenses down to the various chairperson levels. We hope to have only a small amount in the "other" category. The BOD can then review them before the next meeting and be ready to discuss any issues about the expenses being over their budget.

ACTION ITEM: Russ Laurie, Ann Huffman and the entire BOD

### 3. Secretary's report

The membership requests are very slow now. Every time there is a renewal or new member, the BOD and Kelly Goebel get a new email list of club members. WPA has a membership in the National Fireworks Association. Russ Laurie mentioned we may wish to upgrade our membership 1 level. WPA can advertise in their publications. Ann is to research the cost to advertise and to increase our membership level. Tim is to write up an advertisement for us to submit.

ACTION ITEM: Ann Huffman and Tim Thompson

#### 4. Newsletter Update

Tim requests the BOD send in their articles soon. He is looking for more articles and pictures. He does not have a printer yet for the newsletter. He is to call Gary Berg about past cost breakouts and look for ways to cut the cost. Several members have requested only 1 copy per household. Tim needs the deadline date for the newsletter's mailing. He does not have a mailing date as of now.

ACTION ITEM: TIM THOMPSON AND ENTIRE BOD

#### 5. DO IT 2005 committee update by Tom Calderwood

The sites in Primm, NV, Mesquite, NV, Laughlin, NV and Lake Havasu City are being considered. Rob would like to find a permanent home for all future DO IT's. There is no progress to report. Many of the sites are too close to highways or too primitive.

#### 6. Commercial sponsorship for WWB 17

Greg Adler now has the list of Lake Havasu City city hall contacts.

#### 7. New Business

a. Tom Calderwood, as WPA VP, is the coordinator between WPA and our web site. This includes all forms, ads, and web links appearing on the web.

b. Our ATF&E license will need to be renewed in late summer.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:35

Motion by Rita Oesterle; Seconded by RUSS LAURIE

Respectfully submitted,  
Rita Oesterle, WPA Secretary



## **Information Regarding the CPSC Action against Firefox**

By Tom Handel with John Steinberg

This article is from the January issue of American Fireworks News, a leading fireworks industry publication. They have generously given us permission to make it available here. A serious situation, which has been developing over the past year, has now reached a stage where action by - and a specific response from - our community of hobbyist pyros are necessary. In our considered opinion, this Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) action constitutes the single greatest threat to amateur pyrotechnic manufacture we have ever faced and is an action that could well, for all practical purposes, end hobbyist pyrotechnics, as we currently know it.

### **The Facts**

On Monday, 29 November 2004, the CPSC served Gary and Diane Purrington of Firefox with a Complaint for Injunction, the terms of which demand certain constraints on Firefox sales of pyrotechnic chemicals. The details are below, but in summary, it forbids or very severely limits sale of all common oxidizers and many common pyrotechnic fuels to anyone who does not hold a BATFE manufacturing license.

A few days later we had our winter Crackerjacks meeting. John Steinberg and I had the pleasure to spend the day and dinner in the company of a group of pyro notables from all over the country, as well as numerous Crackerjacks. The CPSC suit and related issues were frequent topics of discussion throughout the day. In conversation it came up that Harry Gilliam had, earlier that day, informed John Steinberg that Pyrotek, a pyro chemicals and supplies dealer in Hallstead, PA, had already signed a CPSC consent decree. As a direct result, it was alleged, Pyrotek is very likely to go out of business.

The next day I went to the Pyrotek web site ([www.pyrotek.org](http://www.pyrotek.org)) and had a look for myself. It would appear they are still in business, but the pattern of chemicals which they now no longer sell (e.g., any aluminum suitable for flash) and those that are "out of stock" bears an eerie resemblance to the CPSC list from the Firefox injunction as enumerated below. The correspondence is not perfect, but it's close.

The next shoe fell about 9:00 AM on Tuesday, 14 December when Harry Gilliam at Skylighter received an un-announced visit from two representatives of the CPSC. They spent about five hours with him, asking lots of questions about "flash kits" and "boomers," and going through several boxes of Skylighter's sales records. They made copies of some materials to take away with them for further study (or evidence).

### **What does all this mean?**

This is clearly a disaster for Firefox, but even more importantly, there are a lot of non-federally-licensed hobbyist pyros out there legally manufacturing fireworks of various types who will be severely affected if the CPSC is successful. Here's how it works.

'Spouse I'm a whistle rocket fanatic and I am not federally licensed. Assuming I'm over the age of 21 and can prove it, right now I can go to my friendly neighborhood Firefox and legally buy as much Potassium Benzoate, Sodium Salicylate, red Iron Oxide, Potassium Perchlorate, (and anything else I need) as my pyro appetite requires and my pyro budget will allow. I can legally preprocess these materials - mill, screen, weigh, and to a limited extent mix (so long as oxidizers and fuels remain separate and no pyrotechnically live material is created) - in my garage or basement or back yard. I can legally transport these materials to the site of a federally licensed manufacturer (say, the PGI or a regional club). Given appropriate permission from the licensee, I can then, under his license, legally mix my pre-processed materials to create my whistle mix, a pyrotechnically live composition (an explosive, if you will). I can legally press my whistle rockets and fly them to my heart's content (given the licensee/WPA has the appropriate shooting permits).

Now lets look at this scenario (and it is only one) after the CPSC action: Most of it remains the same, but the critical first step, acquisition of the raw materials to pursue my hobby, has been rendered impossible. Firefox can only sell me one pound of Potassium Perchlorate, Potassium Benzoate and Sodium Salicylate per year. That isn't many four-pound whistle rockets. Fortunately, they can still sell me unlimited quantities of red Iron Oxide (rust) (that's a joke). Even with all the things I can still legally do - processing and transporting materials, creating whistle mix at a licensed manufacturer's facility, building and shooting rockets - it is all for nothing since I cannot legally acquire the necessary raw materials any more.

So, you say, too bad for Firefox, but ring up old Harry at Skylighter and get your materials from him instead. Or maybe that Pyrotek outfit in Pennsylvania.

Well, Pyrotek seems to be "out of stock" on Potassium Perchlorate (as well as many other things). And Skylighter, well, that



works for now, but the CPSC has already visited him, and given their historical, well documented and unrelenting war on anything having to do with fireworks, it is, in our considered opinion, inevitable that Harry will not be far behind Firefox and Pyrotek if the CPSC is successful. Armed with the precedents established with Firefox (and perhaps Pyrotek), they will force Skylighter to accede to the same conditions.

But it gets much worse. Firefox has said (and I believe) that imposition of these restrictions will drive them out of the pyro-chemicals-in-hobbyist-quantities business. There is not enough business available from BATFE-licensed hobbyist manufacturers, to whom they can still sell legally, to keep them afloat. (Non-hobbyist manufacturers don't buy from Firefox they go to Hummel-Croton or Service Chemical and buy their chemicals by the drum and pallet, not the pound.) The same argument will apply to Pyrotek (perhaps already has) and Skylighter in turn, and the result will be that there are no longer any suppliers of any pyro chemicals in hobbyist quantities. Even though someone could legally sell me a pound of Potassium Perchlorate and Sodium Salicylate a year, there is no one in business any more who will do so. Though oxidizers and metals will be the big problem, we'll even be back to combing the drug store shelves and garden shops for such mundane materials as sulfur.

So, you say, let's all just go get federally licensed and solve the problem that way.

It won't happen. Those in our community who are not now federally licensed (the vast majority - most of Firefox's customers) are casual pyrotechnists who do not currently require a federal license to legally pursue their hobby (see above). For them the hassles (e.g., storage/magazines/inspections/logs), expense and difficulty of acquiring and maintaining a federal license are either impossible to deal with or simply not worth it. The ranks of hobbyists will diminish (as the CPSC grins with glee), and the market for even the chemicals that Firefox could still legally sell will diminish even more.

In a cruel example of a feedback mechanism, the foreseeable unavailability of any pyro chemicals in hobbyist quantities from anywhere acts as an additional deterrent to those currently unlicensed hobbyists who might decide to pursue licensure. Why bother if you won't be able to get your chemicals and supplies anyway?

In a final double-reverse-whammy-gotcha, (pointed out to me by one of my colleagues in the Florida club) those few remaining licensed hobbyists left standing once the dust from the CPSC vs. our vendors fight settles will soon find themselves without any licensed, permitted, and insured events left at which they can make and shoot the things they like to manufacture. This is because many pyro club members that aren't licensed will quit the pyro clubs in droves, and without their dues how do the pyro clubs meet the exorbitant cost of insurance?

Pretty picture, eh? This is our future if we don't act.

### **What is being done?**

This must be stopped now. This is not about Firefox, it is about the survival of our hobby, but Firefox is the proverbial canary in the coalmine. If they fall, the likely path from there is all too clear. A legal team, John Brooke and Doug Mawhorr of Muncie, Indiana, has been assembled and they have been asked by the Purringtons to notify the CPSC that the case will proceed to litigation. Doug Mawhorr has provided an initial review and opinion of the legal ramifications of this case which is printed elsewhere in this issue of AFN.

What is needed now is money to support their defense and perhaps ultimately the defense of our other vendors.

No matter what happens from here on out, the one incontestably useful thing we can do now is to accumulate as large a war chest as possible. Whether the case proceeds to litigation, which seems very likely, or settles, competent legal representation and hired expert help are both indispensable and expensive. It remains remotely possible that the accumulation of a truly huge war chest (like multiple six figures) on our part could help prompt the CPSC to negotiate a settlement. If this case does proceed to litigation, the legal fees will skyrocket. Summary: Building the war chest is the most constructive thing we can do right now and it will be needed in almost any conceivable scenario.

Any individual or organization can write a check in any amount they can afford to The Fireworks Foundation. Since the Fireworks Foundation is a 501.c (3), your contribution is tax deductible so long as you do not DIRECT the Foundation on how to use the monies. If you would like your donation to be tax-deductible, you may write on your check (in the Memo section) "For the Chemical Defense Fund or other purposes as required." That way you are not strictly telling the Foundation how to use the money. If you don't care about tax deductibility, you can write (in the Memo section) "For the Chemical Defense Fund" in which case the Foundation will be bound to use your money for that purpose.

[Editor's note: Donations can also be made electronically via the Fireworks Foundation website at [www.fireworksfoundation.com](http://www.fireworksfoundation.com).]  
Checks should be payable to "The Fireworks Foundation" and mailed to:

Mike Swisher  
Treasurer-Fireworks Foundation  
14511 Olinda Blvd. N  
Stillwater, Minnesota 55082

Thank you for listening and considering,

Tom Handel  
1st VP PGII  
Proud member of Crackerjacks, FPAG, WPA.

John Steinberg  
Immediate Past-President, PGI  
Proud Member of the CrackerJacks, the WPA, FPAG, the NWPAAA, and the Canadian Fireworks Association  
Honorary Member: MPAG, NHPA, CPA



Remember, this affects all of us. When you see the donation locations at our events, please take a moment and contribute to the cause!



**Wetter Water Blast**  
**Greg Dandurand**  
**Soggy skies above**  
**Fiery colors fly high**  
**Cheers dry the faithful**

I know opening this article with a haiku is unusual, but I considered submitting a series of photos with me in a tutu, explaining WWB 16 through the medium of interpretive dance. Not wanting to be the first member of the WPA drummed out on a morals charge, I humbly submit the following:

I was awakened in my humble abode to the sounds of clanging and banging in my kitchen. I rushed out to find two fellow pyros playing with various items from under the sink, trying to mix up an impromptu display before we left for Lake Havasu City. I handed them a screwdriver and pointed to the nearest electrical outlet. I knew that would keep them busy for a while. I set about getting ready to leave. The chatter on the WPA list about the weather flashed before my eyes as I loaded the trunk of my car with a raincoat, two ponchos, and a plastic tarp. Hindsight being 20/20, I should have thrown in a canoe. The 3-hour ride was unusually quiet, with the faint smell of singed hair hanging in the air (good call on the screwdriver trick). Arriving at the Ramada, we checked in and found our room. Perfect, less than 75 steps from the Havasu room.

We then went to SARA Park to get our credentials and see how set-up was going. Rita Oesterle was there to greet us, her efficient staff ably handing out badges and parking passes. Flipping through the official program, I thought it was strange that below the general conduct and safety rules, beneath the big warning on being under the influence of alcohol on the site, there was an advertisement for a neighborhood bar. At least it was a place to go after being finished on site. Next to the registration booth, Frances Marquez had set up a small table advertising the pyro job opportunities at Disneyland. After reading the grooming requirements, I knew it would be useless to apply.

Wandering around the site, everything was where it should be, no big changes from years past. Running into several people (figuratively), comments were made about the chances of rain. I tried to keep a positive spin on things, commenting that the rain would keep the dust down. I can now say we absolutely did not have a dust problem that weekend. The white Class "C" tent was the center of activity in the pyro circus. A large forklift was straining under its load of goodies, its forks cradling a pallet of fireworks like an elephant's tusks would move the cotton candy machine into the Big Top of years gone by.

I checked with my Class "B" vendor to make sure my order had arrived. I like the fact that we were able to order and shoot Class "B" under the club's license. I hope this practice will continue for future DO-ITs and WWBs. I know the paperwork at the magazines seem to run smoothly. At no time over the weekend did I have any problem accessing my product. I just hope the paperwork on the club officers is not overwhelming.

The staff RV park was in place, I know some people had been on site for two or three days before the event started to co-ordinate setup. I know I sound like a broken record, but we, as club members can never thank all the volunteers enough for all they do. The club would cease to exist without those who give up large chunks of their time to make our events run smoothly. At the afterglows, Frances gave out some cool schwag for giving of your time to volunteer.

The rain did come, but it was so consistent, I couldn't say one night was better than the others. I helped a friend set up a demo. It was raining so hard on us under the pop-ups on Friday, the head pyro called off the demo until Saturday night. This was about 2 pm. We secured the product, coordinated a new time for the next day, and left the site. Fighting the slick roads back into town, we regrouped at a local watering hole and planned our attack for the following afternoon. After several adult beverages, the rain stopped and the sun shone, giving us a beautiful afternoon. The head pyro held his head in his hands, bemoaning the fact that he called off the demo prematurely. Someone joked that we could probably return to the site and finish set-up since we were only drinking beer and not the hard stuff. That did not go over well, so it was suggested that we immediately do some shots and watch the sunset. The next day, things went as planned, and though it rained steadily until show time, we shot a demo that the crowd loved.

The demos and shows went off in spite of the rain. There were some technical glitches here and there, but I don't think it detracted from the overall mood of the event. They were all well received by the crowds. I don't want to single out any one show or demo as being better than another, as I might run for an office years down the road and need to maintain my political viability. First the WPA, then the state of California! Arnold proved anyone can do it. Plus now it is May, more than 2 ½ months after WWB.

I spent some time down at the "B" line working safety, shooting product, and just hanging out. The rocket line seemed to be humming along pretty well, too, I just didn't spend much time there. (It's safer to watch the ones that don't work from a distance.) I do enjoy the resourcefulness of folks at the WPA. Wandering down to the "B" line during one particularly heavy down pour, I found a group of individuals disassembling some racks to build an ark. While discussions raged over the length of a cubit, some people went to the "C" tent to obtain two of every type of product, so future generations would have pyro. After further debate, the whole idea was dropped after someone complained about dark sky.



The rain played hell in the class "C" tent. It was interesting to watch the river flow through and around all the vendor tables. I don't know if the rain helped or hurt the vendors. Everyone hung out in the tent, waiting for lulls in the weather.

The other place to be was at the afterglows in the Havasu Room at the Ramada. Reuniting with club members seen only once or twice a year was great. It was more than a bunch of people downing fermented hops. We became one, slowly linking karmas and hatching plots and ideas. Many important topics were covered, especially by the late, late crowd. I was in deep discussion with a senior board member for a while. We talked about Art, Cliff, Bob, Wade, Doug, Herb, Rose, and Pete. None of these people are members, but it was an important conversation. In true camaraderie and with a positive can-do attitude, the late night crew came together when presented with an opportunity to go to Las Vegas. Phone calls were made and it looked like we would get a helicopter to land in the parking lot of the Ramada to take us to an unnamed casino in Vegas. We could gamble for a while, then return in time for the WPA business meeting in the morning. A few snags presented themselves, and it changed to a couple of limos. That morphed into some vans to Laughlin. When that spiraled down into a couple of Big Wheels and a go-cart, The item was tabled until next year, when some preplanning will make it happen. Even an impromptu toga party rally at the last minute couldn't save this project.

The next morning at the business meeting was a little foggy. Ann Huffman was elected treasurer. Thank you Alicia for your hard work. Rita was re-elected to secretary, I think, and we have a new vice president (I took a nap). I'm sure the officers will cover board business in great detail in their respective columns. Sorry about that, but writing this article 2 ½ months later is not the best idea.

Sunday night was clean out the magazine night. It was great to be with the safety crew as they lit all the leftovers at once (thanks Randy). It was its own little show. No one has a name for it, so I christen thee HELLFIRE! WWB 16 was over too soon. No major problems were encountered, and hopefully everyone made it back to work OK. Lake Havasu City makes us feel welcome every year.

Maybe next year they can work on the weather.



**I know Bill M. loves to do pyro, but this is taking it to a whole new level.**



**Can you say fwooooomp?**



**The rain was heavy during WWB XVI. However true thump junkies ever let a little water dampen their spirits!**



**My Wet and Wild Winterblast Experience  
And the making of "Keepers of the Flame"**  
By Tyler Norman

I really wanted to join the WPA in 2003, but I couldn't have made it to Havasu that year due to scheduling conflicts with the family. I've been fascinated with fireworks my whole life. I can remember going to see my first fireworks show back in 1988. I was four years old. It was a small little 4th of July show at the local high school, with nothing bigger than a 5" shell in the program. Nevertheless, my virgin eyes had never beheld the beauty of fireworks before, and I was immediately overcome with fascination by these things. I had to know more about them.

My friend since pre-school, Jeffrey Olmstead, began telling me stories in grade-school about all the great fireworks fun he had at his aunt's ranch in Nevada. I knew that someday I had to get in on this fireworks thing. As the years passed, I watched show after show, wishing I could get behind that yellow tape and see just what these men behind the scenes seemed to be hiding from the general public. After seeing many a terrific fireworks show at Angel Stadium in Anaheim (or whatever they're calling the place this week), my desire to one day shoot off my own shows only grew stronger within me. As I told more and more people about this, I started to feel like little Ralphie in "A Christmas Story" being told by everyone, "You'll shoot your eye out, kid"

In 2003 I decided I was finally going to do something about this. I was going to join the WPA, after hearing about these things called fireworks conventions on various websites. Unfortunately for me, there were scheduling conflicts with my family for President's Day Weekend, and so Winterblast was out. Membership would have to wait until 2004.

As a film student, I began toying with the idea of doing a movie about people going to a fireworks convention. At first I was going to have Actors involved, and have these fictitious characters in the movie participating in the actual convention. I jockeyed around with this idea for a while, until I began to realize this concept was unfeasible in the immediate future. Thus were the beginnings of "Keepers of the Flame", a documentary film showing the true character of pyrotechnicians as they just be themselves.

I was so happy when February 2005 finally rolled around. I could barely contain myself, I was so excited that I was finally going to shoot off some professional fireworks. Just a few weeks earlier I had come into possession of a brand new Sony HDR-FX1 video camera, the first compact HDTV camera to hit the market. The prospect of submitting my film to the 2006 Newport Beach Film Festival became more plausible with the advent of this high-resolution video format at my disposal.

I ordered this assortment of 72 3-inch shells from Wolverine West, along with a package of 24 5-inch shells. I had never been to a Winter Blast before, so I wasn't entirely sure how it would all go down. I was assuming that "Open B Shooting" meant that each person got their own little cluster of mortars and set up their own little show. Obviously, knowing how it works now, and realizing how puny a 3-inch shell break is, I'm planning to only shoot 5 inches and above next year, with slightly fewer shells.

The first night of open shooting was crazy. I barely started getting my shells off the ground when it suddenly began POURING RAIN. Here we were, helmets and goggles on, running around in this monsoon-like rain with explosions all around us, I realized, this must have been what Vietnam was like. Only without people dying. Everybody was running like hell for the Class C tent for cover, and by the time I got there I was drenched. The C Tent was absolutely flooded. There was water flowing across the floor, so there was really nowhere to sit down. I had spent so much time with the Lantis crew filming their setup and doing interviews the day before, that my only real thought was, "I hope it stops raining for the big show". As I look outside into the downpour, I see that there are still people out there at the C lines shooting stuff off against the rain and lightning. It was like these people were duking it out with God over who's got the better fireworks. This is when I really began to realize the true extent of the devotion some people have to pyrotechnics.



Sure enough, after about a half hour of torrential downpour, we get news over the loudspeakers that the NOAA weather band has reported a clear-up for at least the next 45 minutes. Thank God for that. I was worried that I was going to have all this setup and interview footage with no pay-off. At this point I am more freezing than I've ever been in my life, though it's only 60 degrees out. I am absolutely soaked to the bone. The show began, and I started rolling the tape. Unfortunately the rain had knocked out a number of the electric rails used to fire the show, and it was left with awkward pauses throughout it. But the parts of the show that did fire were impressive. I had my footage.

After the show, Bill Zuber fired his "wall of fire", and I remember how good those two seconds of heat felt. That night, I sat in the hot shower until the water heater ran out. What a crazy night this was. It was an experience I'll remember for the rest of my life.

The next night was great. No sign of rain, just us and our fireworks. In fact, for a good part of Open Shooting, I had one of the entire shooting lines to myself. It was fireworks heaven. The night ended as we all sat down and watched the final public display from the B lines, then headed on down to the final Afterglow. I looked back over the last few days, realizing I taken a major step towards life's dream: to fire a professional display. I am already saving money in anticipation of Winter Blast 17. I'll definitely be back, this time with a bigger budget and bigger shells.





# 1 PYRO NEWS

Volume 1, Number 1

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————— M. P. Vander Horck, Editor —————

WHAT IS PYRO NEWS? As of this first shaky issue, it's not much, but as Thomas Alva Edison once asked, "What good is a newborn baby?"

We are launching PYRO NEWS in the hope of its becoming your periodical! You know who you are — you are one of those "nuts" like us who can't resist putting various chemicals together to see what will happen. You like the loud bang, the cloud of smoke, the flash of light, the trail of sparks, the colored flames that result.

You may be in any age bracket, and your knowledge of chemistry may be small or great, your experience limited or extensive, from that of the kid who has just gotten his first chemistry set to that of the professional pyrotechnist who sells his knowledge and experience for commercial fireworks displays.

WHATEVER BRACKET YOU FIT, you are one of "us", and we welcome you to the fiery circle of experimenters, artists, philosophers and "natural-born pyromaniacs" who find pyrotechnics so fascinating.

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WE HOPE THAT PYRO NEWS will become a clearing house for the ideas, experiences, new formulas, and questions of its readers. Our field of interest is so poorly covered in books and other publications that many heads are scratched in search of fairly

simple answers. We hope to achieve a "meeting of minds" in these pages, and you can help, either by sending us your questions or information you may wish to share.

TOPICS OF INTEREST to our readers might include the following:

- Your own experiments with fireworks and the results you have had,
- How you first became interested in pyrotechnics,
- Especially good (or bad) results you've had or seen,
- How easy (or hard) it is for you to obtain the necessary chemicals,
- Legal restrictions on fireworks in your town, county, or state,
- Number of fireworks displays in your area per year and dates of any upcoming ones.

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IN SHORT, PYRO NEWS will try to bring together in its pages the questions, answers, and comments of all of us who have been bitten by the pyrotechnic bug. If you have something to ask, tell, swap, or sell, get in touch with the editor (see "FIRE AWAY!" department) or MAILMART.



## WHAT KIND OF "FIRE-BUG" ARE YOU?

The fact that you are reading this copy of PYRONEWS indicates that you have more than the usual interest in things of a pyrotechnic nature. We would like to hear from you as to how you first developed an interest in fireworks and what you have done about it. Perhaps you were just born with nostrils that twitched at the odor of burned powder, like your editor, and conducted your first experiments forty years ago with the fascinating crackers, fountains, roman candles, spit-devils, rockets, and salutes you bought with your pocket money from the bunting-draped fireworks stands. Maybe, now that the sale of fireworks is illegal in so many parts of our country, you just make a point of attending every professional fireworks display that comes along. Possibly you have obtained chemicals and instructions and discovered the fascination of "do-it-yourself" fireworks.

While PYRONEWS is mainly slanted toward the latter group of amateur fireworkers, we feel that the cause of modern pyrotechnics can best be advanced by exchange of ideas, knowledge, and experience among fireworks buffs of all categories, from rank amateur to experienced professional. Every pyrotechnist, whether he experiments with fireworks as a hobby or earns his living by manufacturing or shooting them, is essentially an "amateur", in the sense of doing what he likes to do, and it is to all such "amateur fireworkers" that PYRONEWS is dedicated!

Readers in all these categories will be interested to know that the editor, in collaboration with W. R. Withrow, has in preparation a book, THE MAGIC OF FIREWORKS, which will combine under one cover the many interesting facets of pyrotechnics from early times to modern practice, including graduated experiments from the simplest fountains, gerbes, and crackers to the construction of aerial shells. We feel that such an addition to the literature will fill the gap between strictly historical books, such as those of Brock, the "how to do it" books of twenty years ago, like Weingart, the technical ones, Davis, for example, and the only modern book we know of, by Ellern, which deals very little with the use of pyrotechnics for entertainment. Target date for publication is about a year -- look for future announcements.

Now, what are you doing? Do you have a laboratory, proving grounds, home-made equipment? Do you shoot your own private displays? Are you perhaps a licensed pyrotechnist with some displays already contracted for? We would like to publish dates and locations of such displays far enough in advance for our readers to take advantage of the information.

Other items of interest to PYRONEWS readers would be the fireworks regulations in your city, county, and state. These, of course, vary widely, from "no fireworks" to "safe and sane", to "anything goes", and we'd like to know if you have encountered any problems in your own particular area. We plan to devote future space to a discussion of the legal aspects of experimenting with fireworks, which is more or less a "gray" area, depending on interpretation of the law. While shipment of finished fireworks items to unlicensed persons is generally prohibited, this ban does not cover the mailing of fireworks ingredients and the information on how to combine them. Perhaps our attorney friend who submitted the first question in our FIRE AWAY! department can send us more detailed information from the law library for publication in PYRONEWS!

Again, we are anxiously awaiting your letters about your own activities, so that we can share them with our many readers. This is YOUR PERIODICAL.



## FIRE AWAY!

This department of PYRONEWS is being inaugurated as a "Question and Answer" column, in which we shall try to give you the best and most up-to-date information in the field of pyrotechnics. Being what it is, this field is rather poorly and sparsely covered in the available literature, and, being the perfectionists they are, amateur fireworkers are always seeking answers. We hope to reconcile the two in this department. Address your questions to EDITOR, PYRONEWS, 6359 Wunderlin Ave., San Diego, Cal. 92114, and we will answer as many as possible in this column -- sorry, we are not at present able to answer letters individually.

QUESTION: I recently purchased a copy of your excellent Fireworks Manual [THE MANUFACTURE OF FIREWORKS WITH HOME-MADE EQUIPMENT] and am most interested in experimenting with the many items listed. I have managed to obtain all of the necessary chemicals ... but have run into a problem in obtaining paper for roman candle and rocket cases. At page 16 of the Manual, you state that ... "The only suitable material is feather-edged strawboard." I have contacted several retail paper suppliers, but none of them have ever heard of "strawboard", feather-edged or otherwise, nor have they heard of "wasteboard"... Can you give me some idea of the general appearance, weight, and important characteristics of the strawboard, or can you suggest some possible ... substitute for this use?

ANSWER: Sir, you are a victim of terminology -- past and present. We are informed by Mr. Lou Ellis of Fibreboard Paper Products Corporation (who has been in the paper business for over twenty years) that what you should have asked for, in place of "strawboard", was chipboard, a fairly stiff greyish paper similar to that used to back up writing tablets. Although chipboard is not available in the feather-edged variety, this is a requirement not essential to rolling good cases. The only advantage achieved is a very smooth final turn when rolling the case, and the real perfectionist can achieve it by sanding the edge of the paper before rolling.

It must be remembered that the only function of a case for rockets, candles, gerbes, or fountains is to contain the burning mixture without bursting, and that this kind of case can be made of many materials, including the paper this PYRONEWS is printed on, if properly rolled and glued up and dried! But we hope you will file this and all future issues for future reference and use other sources of paper for your cases. The lazy pyrotechnist will also find many sources of pre-rolled tubes today by just looking around, and save himself the trouble of "rolling his own". Just be sure they come close to the dimensions indicated. In 1966, it still amounts to this -- the soul of fireworks is experimentation -- with suitable precautions!

We have so many questions at hand concerning paper products mentioned in the Fireworks Manual that we will summarize it thus: The modern equivalent of strawboard is chipboard. Ask for Kraft paper by its own name, either in large rolls or in small packages -- it's just plain brown wrapping paper. Manila paper is nearly the same, only white in color. "Hardware paper" is now called construction paper, so ask for it at building supply companies, if you are a perfectionist in rolling rocket cases -- but you don't really need it to make a good rocket case. The names, "ragboard", "wasteboard", and "newsboard", found in older fireworks literature, don't mean a thing in the retail trade today, so don't bother to ask for them.

(continued)

(\* A review, answer and Jan. .... 1 11-1 01)



## (FIRE AWAY! — continued)

QUESTION: Are the ends of skyrockets choked with clay or by crimping? If the latter, does the case have to be wet to accomplish this?

ANSWER: Clay chokes are now used almost entirely for the nozzles of all rockets from one-ounce size (3/8" bore) up. Smaller cases for squibs or serpents are choked by crimping while still wet, using a suitable machine or looping a strong wire around the case near one end and pulling it tight against a smaller rod or dowel inserted in the tube.

QUESTION: What size should the spindle be that is used to keep the center of the rocket hollow? When this is removed, won't the powder fall from the sides with a slight jar?

ANSWER: The general proportions for rockets of all sizes are as follows: the length of the internal charge is roughly eight times the bore, or internal diameter of the tube, and the spindle for forming the hollow center is one-third of this diameter, extending into the case 7/8 of its length. For small one-ounce rockets, the spindle can be cylindrical, such as a nail of the proper dimensions, but for larger sizes, it should taper slightly from the choke end toward the head of the rocket. This forms the proper cavity in the propelling charge and makes it easier to remove the rocket from the spindle after ramming.

The rammed rocket powder is quite solid and will take considerable abuse without crumbling or falling out of the case, and the same applies to the dry clay used for the choke and head end. Both appear to contain enough moisture to incorporate quite solidly, and this will become evident to the experimenter when he tries ramming his own rockets.

QUESTION: How is the fuse inserted in the skyrocket if the center is hollow?

ANSWER: It is inserted through the choke and held in place by a small amount of paste called "primer" applied where it passes through the hole. This is simply a moistened mixture of black powder with a small amount of dextrin or starch added, which, when dry, serves the dual purpose of holding the fuse in place and insuring ignition of the rocket when fired. It should be used even in the smallest rockets, rather than depending on the small spurt of flame from the fuse itself, which often fails to light the propelling charge.

QUESTION: I'm looking for a mixture to form a paste that will get hard, like a household match. This is to be set off with a battery. A fine wire is soldered between two lead wires. When the current is applied, the fine wire gets white hot before burning up ... this sets off the paste.

ANSWER: See our answer to the previous question. Black powder primer is an excellent "first fire", as it ignites at a comparatively low temperature and gives a good spurt of flame to communicate the fire to another mixture. You will find it to work very well for the purpose you describe.

We are sorry that space does not permit replies to the many other interesting questions we have received, but this is only our first issue of PYRONEWS. If we skipped you this time, be sure to watch future issues!

\* \* \*  
-4-

From the way back machine comes the first known pyro newsletter! Take a look at the issue date!!!

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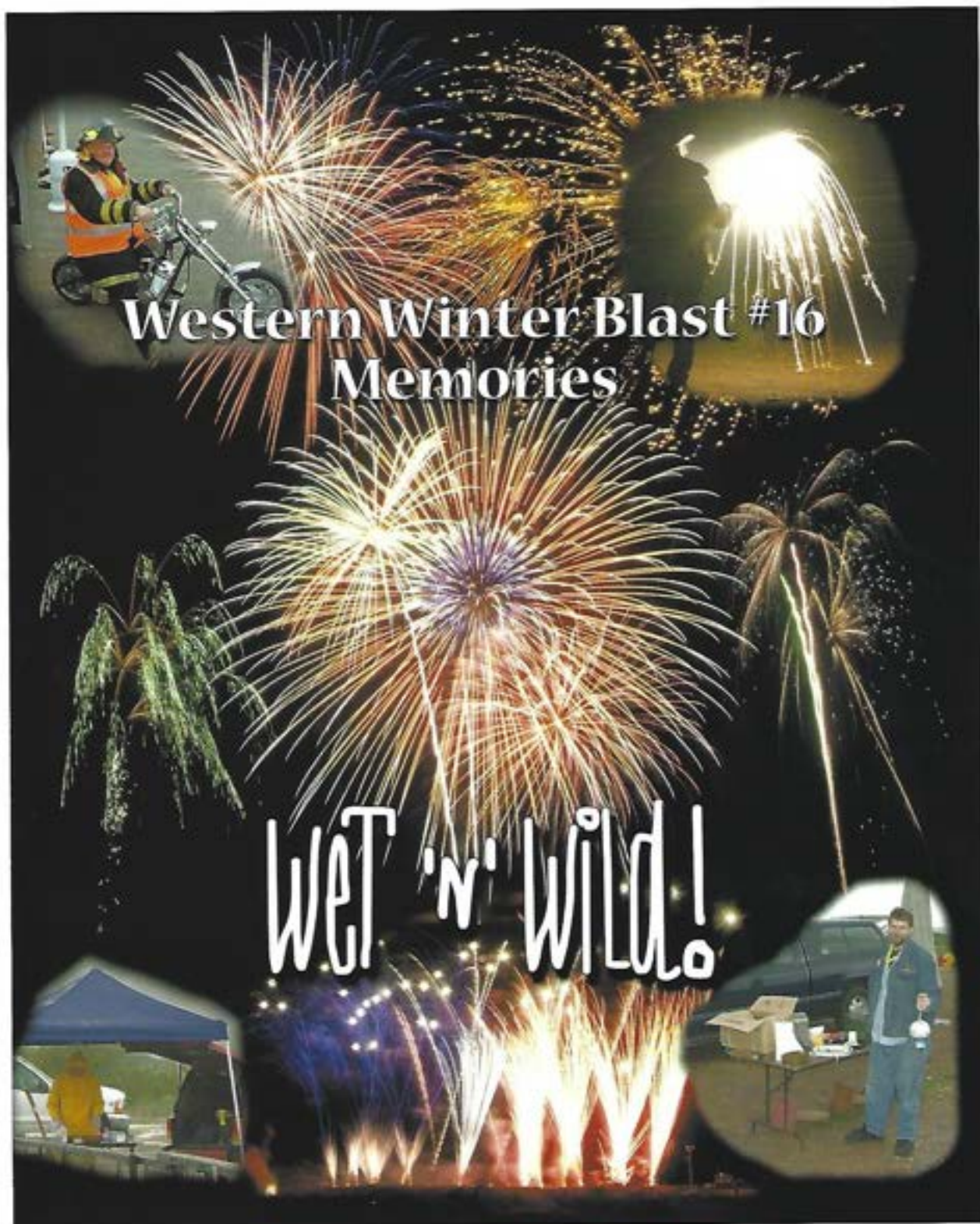


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**Debbie Merlino**

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Fax: 415-209-0013  
[dmerlino@combinedspecialties.com](mailto:dmerlino@combinedspecialties.com)

**You may tear this out or copy it and send it in for your DOIT registration**



The Western Pyrotechnic Association is pleased to present

Do It by the River #7

October 6, 7, 8, 2005

Open to WPA members in good standing and their immediate families only.

Children 18 years of age and older must be members of the WPA to attend this event.

**THIS FORM MUST BE COMPLETED AND RETURNED WITH FULL PAYMENT BY September 9, 2005**

Registration forms postmarked after this date are considered late or on-site

**LATE OR ON-SITE REGISTRATIONS WILL NOT INCLUDE EVENT T-SHIRT**

Member's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Membership Number \_\_\_\_\_

Member's Address \_\_\_\_\_

Member's Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Member's E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Additional shirts are available only if pre-ordered and pre-paid by September 16, 2005.

**Registration**

Member	\$50.00	\$ _____	
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Site Clean Up Fee ***	\$10.00	\$ 10.00	Total registration \$ _____

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S	_____	x \$16.00 =	\$ _____	
M	_____	x \$16.00 =	\$ _____	
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XXL	_____	x \$16.00 =	\$ _____	
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			Total shirts	\$ _____
			Grand Total	\$ _____

Make check or money-order payable to the: Western Pyrotechnic Association, and mail with this completed form to:

WPA - Do It by the River

P.O. Box 10116

Canoga Park, CA 91309

Please list names ONLY IF ATTENDING THIS EVENT

Spouse / Life Partner \_\_\_\_\_

Children \_\_\_\_\_

You must make your own hotel accommodations / reservations

The host hotel is The Ramada Inn. Call them direct at 800-528-5169 for registration.

We have secured special lower rates for our members for this event. Tell them you're with "Do It By The River" as the rate code.

**A WAIVER OF LIABILITY FORM WILL BE PROVIDED AT THE EVENT. THIS FORM MUST BE SIGNED BY ALL PEOPLE ATTENDING OR ADMITTANCE TO THE EVENT WILL NOT BE ALLOWED.**

\*\* A Student Member is defined as a member between 18 and 25 years of age, who is currently enrolled in a minimum of 12 college units. Proof of enrollment must be provided with submission of this form.

\*\*\* A \$10.00 clean up fee must accompany each registration form. This fee is refundable if the member stays until the site is cleaned up, and all of the equipment is put away into the container. If the member leaves prior to this time, this fee is forfeited. All forfeited money will be combined and divided up equally among those members who stay to the end of cleanup on Sunday.

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