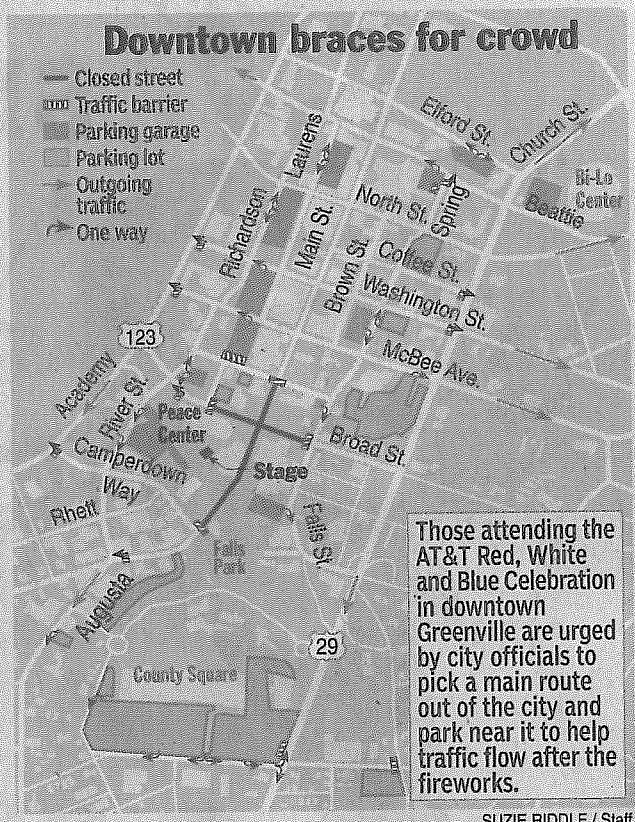
Greenville fireworks to draw thousands

Police, parking resources mobilized

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Those attending the AT&T Red, White and Blue Celebration in downtown Greenville are urged by city officials to pick a main route out of the city and park near it to help traffic flow after the fireworks.

SUZIE RIDDLE / Staff

Approximately 60,000 people are expected to gather in downtown Greenville late Saturday afternoon for the city's annual Fourth of July festival.

In a city loaded with free events, the AT&T Red, White and Blue Celebration downtown is usually the year's largest singe-day festival. Greenville Police Chief Terri Wilfong said she will have all 190 of her officers working that day.

The fireworks start at about 9:30 p.m. with about 2,000 shells launching from County Square in 15 minutes.

Redemption World Outreach Center will begin its 20-minute, 1,500-shell show at its Haywood Road campus at 11 p.m.—about a half-hour later than previously advertised, said the church's media director, Joe Hayes.

"It's going to be a blast," he said.

Redemption moved its show time to give traffic from the city's show a chance to clear out of Interstate 385, Hayes said.

Also this weekend, the state Highway Patrol plans to debut a 31-trooper team focused on catching drunk and drugged drivers. Seven people died on the state's highways during last year's three-day holiday weekend, according to the state Department of Public Safety.

Admission to the city's events, which begin at 5 p.m., is free. They are centered on the southern end of Main Street around Falls Park. The city will charge a special event fee of $5 to park in all of its garages, except for the one on Richardson Street, which will be free.

Redemption's Freedom Fest begins at 3 p.m. with free admission and parking.

In anticipation of a mass exodus after the downtown event, city officials are asking visitors to choose one of the major routes out of the city and park close to it to help keep traffic moving. Those routes are College, Church, East Washington, South Academy and Augusta streets, along with the section of East North Street that runs into I-385.

Parking will be free at County Square, but the number of spaces will be limited due to a Greenville Drive baseball game scheduled for the afternoon, said county spokesman Bob Mihalic. Alcohol, grills, personal fireworks and littering are prohibited.

Smoking isn't allowed at the city's festival.