



## Mesa: 50,000 people attended Celebration of Freedom

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Garin Groff, Tribune |

Mesa estimates that 50,000 people gathered downtown for its inaugural Celebration of Freedom event that included fireworks and pyrotechnics being shot off buildings.

Saturday's fireworks drew the biggest crowd, with as many as 35,000 in the main event area along Main Street and at least 5,000 more people who watched fireworks from other areas.

"It was unbelievable," Mesa spokesman Steve Wright said. "It was wall-to-wall people on Main Street, on Center and McDonald. It was just packed by the time the fireworks began."

About 10,000 people came downtown Friday evening, Wright said, with the excessive heat likely taking a toll on attendance that day.

The city raised \$370,000 in cash and in-kind donations for the event. The city and about 40 merchants put the event together after the Sertoma Club of Mesa cancelled 2009's July 4 fireworks show at Mesa Community College because of a lack of donations.

Mesa hopes the Celebration of Freedom will become signature event for the downtown and Arizona's premiere July festival. Future celebrations will be on the Friday and Saturday before July 4.

The event included patriotic music at the Mesa Arts Center, educational displays and water features to keep people cool. Gov. Jan Brewer spoke shortly before the fireworks on Saturday.

The city didn't have formal estimates beforehand on attendance, but Wright said officials were pleased at how many people the new event lured downtown.

"People have never seen this kind of thing happen before in downtown Mesa," he said.

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