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Smugglers to light Punta Gorda's July 4th

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PUNTA GORDA -- Bruce Laishley remembers as a boy the July 4th fireworks shows in Punta Gorda.

Laishley and his Smugglers Inc. partners -- Ron Evans and Rick Treworgy -- won't let the sky over Punta Gorda go dark this July 4th. They will take over what the Kiwanis Club of Punta Gorda can no longer do -- sponsor the Fourth of July fireworks show in Laishley Park.

"Someone had to pick up the pieces," Laishley said.

For 28 years, the Kiwanis Club of Punta Gorda has staged the July 4th fireworks show. A week ago, the club announced it could no longer afford the \$50,000 for the show.

"We're going to throw a full-day event, starting in the afternoon and lasting until 10 p.m.," said **Chris Evans**, Smugglers' operations manager. Smugglers operates the Captains Club and Harpoon Harry's restaurants at Fishermen's Village. They also plan to build the Laishley Crab Shack at Laishley Park, but it will still be under construction in July.

Evans said the July 4th event will include live music and a variety of foods and beverages. Children's activities are also planned to make the event "family-oriented."

"We have done New Year's Eve fireworks ... so we are familiar with the permitting," Evans said. Other businesses are expected to join Smugglers with the staging of events.

Treworgy said donations from the public would be appreciated, and promised that 100 percent of them will go toward the purchase of fireworks.

"Anything donated will make the show that much better," Treworgy said. Anyone wishing to donate can call Evans at 941-637-1177, ext. 119.

"I'm glad they're doing it," said Bob Naylor, a Punta Gorda former fire chief and member of the Kiwanis fireworks committee. "I think people in Charlotte County care about this nation's birthday, and those now serving (in the military)."

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