

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

July 6, 2006

Happy Summer!

Does your summer begin on Memorial Day, or is it the last day of school? Other possibilities are the official June 21 date and Independence Day. We can all select different days. I cast my vote for the Fourth of July, particularly this year. Massachusetts weather all the way to the end of June remained so cold and rainy that it just fails to justify the name of summer.

Taking last week's patriotic holiday, then, as the beginning of summer, here are the ways I celebrated the Red, White and Blue event. As the state representative for the four towns from the Connecticut River to Monson, I had a range of community events to attend before relaxing with a family barbecue.

The first event came on Saturday as the town of Hampden hosted the celebratory re-opening of the Hampden Free Library. A victim of town budget-cutting, the library was closed for the past twelve months, after townspeople rejected an override vote that would have retained library services. Now they celebrate the new librarian, new books and a new understanding of the importance of a public library. Though the small-town celebration did not fall on Independence Day, an all-American spirit made the day an integral part of my summer memories.

July Fourth always begins for me with an early morning drive to Monson. The town's Girl Scouts host a community pancake breakfast that attracts hundreds of townspeople and begins a day that continues with a parade and Summerfest. The breakfast is a great opportunity for me to talk with townspeople, and many folks are now my day-a-year summer friends.

As they chat with me, a few people generally raise questions or ask for assistance with government red tape. It's always great to be able to take care of issues like this year's problem: a fisherman's inability to secure registration of a motorboat. After a call made by my office, he should have his boat on the water next week. All problems should be so easy to solve.

This year, as always, my Monson breakfast is followed by a race to East Longmeadow to march in that town's parade. Monson's slow pace and individual conversations give way to quick waves to everyone along the parade route. I came with a basketful of American flags to hand out to children along the route. I'm always impressed with the patience of onlookers as they interact with the marching politicians while watching for the bands, mini-cars and decorative floats to come. My march ended before the late morning downpour that dampened the bodies -- but not the spirits -- of revelers.

The family barbecue and Springfield's fireworks completed my day, and the summer of 2006 is launched. It's back to Boston to deal with laws to pass, governor's vetoes to defend and other matters in the business of the people.

Happy Summer!