Hartford Courant.
Because you want to know.™

Midweek Holiday Forces Decisions

Is One Day Off For The Fourth Enough?

By JOANN KLIMKIEWICZ | Courant Staff Writer *June 28, 2007*

Quick, quick: When is the Fourth of July?

No, it's not a trick question. And it's not a dumb one, either.

This year, Independence Day lands, with an awkward thud, on a Wednesday. It's a useless, midweek placement that leaves working stiffs with some uneasy decisions as they interpret which block of days will make up their holiday.

Should they maximize the break by stacking two vacation days to the front of the week, or squirrel them on the back end? Should they sacrifice four days to build an indulgent nine-day holiday? Or should they just make peace with the one measly day off and ride the sluggish workweek?

"We're seeing a lot of people are just taking advantage of a Wednesday Fourth of July and bailing out for the whole week," said James MacPherson, spokesman for the American Automobile Association. "And I'd say more power to 'em. I wish I could join them."

A record 41.1 million Americans are expected to travel during the holiday week that stretches from this Friday to Sunday, July 8, according to an AAA telephone survey of 1,950 adults. About 38 percent of those are leaving town before or on Friday, getting an early start to a holiday that they're patriotically pushing to an average of 5.7 days.

"When [the holiday] falls on a Wednesday, it just screws the entire week up for businesses as a whole,"

said David Lewis, CEO of OperationsInc, a human resources consultancy in Stamford.

Because even if you're at your desk and raring to go, he says, chances are the people you do business with are a part of AAA's sunbathing, firecracking exodus.

"It's a vicious cycle that slows the entire business community down in the United States," Lewis said. "Actually, if people just take the entire work week off, it's a godsend for businesses, because it clears out vacation time in a week where productivity tends to be lower anyway."

But tumbleweeds can't be blowing in every office.

"We don't have much of a choice. We have patients who are pregnant and we have to be here," said Kathleen Parrett, financial manager of Obstetrics, Gynecology & Menopause Physicians PC, a busy shoreline practice. "Having everything come to a complete stop in the middle of the week makes it hard to gear back up for Thursday and Friday when you know half the world is off. But it's something you know when you get into this profession."

Last year, Americans enjoyed a freebie four-day holiday, courtesy of a Tuesday Independence Day. It forced employers' hands, having them relinquish the Monday as well. But workaday justice is always served at the close of the calendar year, Lewis noted.
So although workers will have to contend with the clumsy Wednesday holiday next week, they'll gain in December, when Christmas lands on a Tuesday. A majority of businesses will surrender that Monday.

This year's midweek Fourth of July didn't just force the work-weary to take some creative measures. The folks planning the events those tourists are shuttling off to also had some arranging to do.

Upon checking the calendar a few months back, the staff at Boston's Omni Parker House hotel were a little concerned.

"We really recognized the challenge. It is unique. It's not as easy as a Friday, or a Thursday even," said Richard Donohue, the hotel's marketing coordinator. But the hotel built and heavily promoted its package special around the city's annual Harborfest, which starts today and runs through the Fourth. It threw in a Boston Pops CD, two American flags and a brochure detailing Independence Day events.

And now? "We're almost there. Ninety-nine percent [booked]," with guests scattered through all parts of the holiday week, Donohue said.

In Hartford, Riverfront Recapture's Riverfest is traditionally held on the Saturday before Independence Day. That would have put the celebration on June 30.

But it's hard to get into the spirit of the Fourth when the calendar reads June, said Charles Myers, events director for the nonprofit organization. That and the fact that Riverfront Recapture didn't want to saddle Hartford and East Hartford with the cost of a second Riverfest in the fiscal year that ends June 30 had the organization shifting its plans.

So this year, the 27th annual Riverfest goes off the Saturday after the holiday - July 7, beginning at 4 p.m. More than 300,000 people are expected, Myers said.

The midweek holiday might be a headache for some, but for fireworks professionals like Phil Gauvin, it actually works out beautifully.

This year, Gauvin's Hamden-based Pyro/FX Entertainment will mount 45 fireworks displays in the Fourth of July "rush" that, for the company, spans the end of June through the end of July. The stretched out holiday week has helped translate into more business, an increase of about 25 percent from last year.

"I'm up to my eyeballs," Gauvin said.

He means that in a good way.

Contact Joann Klimkiewicz at jklimkiewicz@courant.com.