

Huge air show kicks off 78th National Cherry Festival

BY GINA GOODMAN
Record-Eagle staff writer

This year's Festival air shows are going to be the largest and longest yet at the 78th Annual National Cherry Festival, with many aerobatic favorites coming back to entertain the crowds.

The National Cherry Festival Air Show is presented by Northern Michigan Toyota Dealers, Yellow Book yellow pages, Alltel, Charter High Speed, Kodiak, Equipment Co., High Pointe Golf Club, Outdoor Channel, in cooperation with WLDR Radio-Sunny 101.9.

"We've got a fabulous lineup this year," said Steve Plamondon, the airshow's director.

To begin the show, the Coast Guard will have a search and rescue demonstration, followed by the NMC Aviation Department doing a fly-by.

Returning this year are the popular soloists Mike Goulian and Sean Tucker, who will perform their seemingly unlimited aerobatic maneuvers.

Goulian, a championship favorite throughout North America and Europe, will perform high speed winding corkscrews, barrel rolls, and aerial wing to wing flips in his Cap 232.

Tucker will be performing stunts in his Oracle Challenger II.

"Sean Tucker is regarded as the top airshow pilot in the world," Plamondon said. "He is very high energy. Lots of tumbles and gyrations."

Some of his stunts include end-over-end tumbles across the sky, and a vertical climb that turns into a drop towards the earth at at 5 to 6G's.

Also in the lineup is Ed Shipley and his WWII P-51



The Blue Angels will perform on July 3-4 at 12:30 p.m. over West Grand Traverse Bay

Mustang. It is without a doubt the most recognized fighter plane, said Plamondon.

Shipley will team up with an F-16 Falcon soloist to do a Heritage Flight.

"It's a touching tribute to our armed forces, from WWII to the present," Plamondon said. "It's a neat demonstration."

Other aircraft in the show are the A-10 Warthog surface to ground tank killer and a T-38 Talon Airforce trainer. The amphibious Grumman Albatross will show off its land and water skills, and on Saturday a B-52 Bomber will do a demonstration.

Returning once again and closing the show is the ever-popular U.S. Navy Blue Angels Flight Demonstration Team. With the four-plane diamond, opposing solos, the six-plane delta formation and the "Sneak Pass" at just 50 feet above sea level, the Navy-trained pilots will have the crowd holding its' breath.

In order to keep the show

safe for spectators, as well as nearby air traffic, much preparation is needed.

"We start our meetings well in advance," Plamondon said.

The Cherry Festival airshow staff must apply to the Federal Aviation Administration to provide a

waiver to close the airspace, an area of five nautical miles, from the surface to 16,000 feet, Plamondon said.

"This restricts any other airplanes from entering that area during the show," he said.

A space two nautical miles long by 3,000 feet deep,

called an "aerobatic box" is also required to keep spectators on the water far enough away from the demonstrations.

"The U.S. Coast Guard and other officials patrol on land and in the water," Plamondon said. "I have a big crew that keeps that place sterile."

This year's show will be a bit longer than in the past, about three hours, because of the many acts, Plamondon said.

"It's going to be very big," he said. "Anytime we have the airshow kicking off, especially with the Blue Angels, it gets the festival off to a great start."

He said he's looking forward to it being the biggest airshow put on by the Cherry Festival ever.

"There's a diverse group of performances that will appeal to a wide audience," Plamondon said.

The shows will get underway at approximately 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, July 3 and Sunday July 4. over West Grand Traverse Bay.

