

The Ohio River, America's Birthday: Historic Fireworks, Drone and Air Show to Headline 50th Sternwheel Festival

Ohio River Sternwheel Festival celebrates its 50th Anniversary and 250th Anniversary of the United States of America with fireworks spectacular.

MARIETTA, OH, UNITED STATES, June 22, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Two historic milestones will come together on the banks of the [Ohio River](#) as the [Ohio River Sternwheel Festival](#) celebrates its 50th Anniversary

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and joins communities across the nation in commemorating the 250th Anniversary of the United States of America with an unprecedented [fireworks](#), drone, and air show spectacular.

Long known for extravagant fireworks displays over the confluence of the Ohio and Muskingum Rivers, Sternwheel Festival organizers today announced plans for a once-in-a-generation celebration that will illuminate the skies above the Ohio River between Marietta, Ohio, and Williamstown, West Virginia, to honor both America's semi-quincentennial

and five decades of one of the nation's premier sternwheel river festivals. The three-day festival runs from Friday, September 11, to Sunday, September 13, 2026.

On Saturday, September 12, 2026, the event, which typically draws more than 100,000 festival-goers over three days, will feature a breathtaking blend of precision aerial performances, state-of-the-art drone technology, pyrotechnic aircraft, and a massive fireworks display choreographed to patriotic music. The aerial show is confirmed as the festival's largest and most ambitious visual presentation.

"For 50 years, the Sternwheel Festival has celebrated the Ohio River's heritage, culture, and spirit," said Dennis Blauser, aerial events chairman. "As our nation marks 250 years of freedom and opportunity, there could be no more fitting place to celebrate than along the river that helped shape America's westward expansion into the Northwest Territory and beyond."

The Saturday evening aerial showcase will honor America's river heritage through dramatic

flyovers and precision performances. As darkness falls, hundreds of drones will create stunning images in the night sky, celebrating the nation's founding, the Ohio River's role in American history, and the Ohio River Sternwheel Festival's 50-year legacy.

The grand finale will feature a spectacular fireworks display launched over the Ohio River, transforming the waterfront into a panorama of color, light, and patriotic pride. Reflections dancing across the river, from beneath the water, off towering bridges and aircraft, will provide a dramatic backdrop for a celebration honoring both the nation's past and its future.

Founded in 1976, the Ohio River Sternwheel Festival has grown into one of the Mid-Ohio Valley's signature events, attracting visitors from across the United States while preserving the rich history of sternwheel riverboats and the communities they helped build.

The 2026 festival will serve as a signature event for Marietta's celebration of America's 250th birthday, highlighting the city's unique place in American history as the first permanent settlement in the Northwest Territory.

Event Highlights

- Historic 50th Anniversary Sternwheel Festival celebration
- Commemoration of the 250th Anniversary of the United States
- Largest fireworks display in Sternwheel Festival history on Saturday, September 12
- Spectacular drone light show featuring patriotic and historical imagery
- Thrilling aerial and aviation demonstrations
- Riverfront viewing on both sides of the Ohio River
- Sternwheel races on Sunday afternoon
- Live entertainment, food vendors, classic car show, art show, family activities Friday, September 11 through Sunday, September 13.

About the Ohio River Sternwheel Festival

Established in 1976, the Ohio River Sternwheel Festival celebrates the heritage of America's inland waterways and the iconic sternwheel riverboats that played a vital role in the development of the Ohio River Valley. The annual event has become one of Ohio's premier festivals and a cherished tradition for generations of families.

Dennis Blauser

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