

CRB
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Clair said the opening will be covered by national media; SC ETV will carry some events live; and people are rearranging vacation schedules so they don't miss a thing.

"I think the community is going to come out and take a close look at what they've been watching being built over the last four years," he said. "The public has been very excited daily about the bridge project, it's always the talk of the town. It's always something positive. They're going to see what they've been looking at from the other bridges."

The opening ceremony is being funded through private donations and fund-raisers, Clair said. No public money is being spent.

One fund-raiser is a concert by the Charleston Symphony Orchestra a few days before the ribbon cutting. Only 600 tickets, at \$200 apiece, are available for the black-tie event, and Clair expects them to sell out as soon as they go on sale.

On either the Thursday or Friday night before the dedication ceremony, depending on the weather, a fireworks display and the lighting of the bridge will provide tens of thousands of onlookers a night to remember.

Fireworks will be set off from barges on both sides of the harbor, from a 5,000-foot section of the new deck and from atop the 570-foot-high towers.

A "fire waterfall" will appear on the main span as fireworks cascade toward the water. The program will feature patriotic and bridge-themed music that will be simulcast on local TV and radio stations.

"It'll certainly be the biggest fireworks show people in this part of the country have ever seen," Clair said, adding that it will be similar to the "Thunder Over Louisville," a show that takes place on the eve of the Kentucky Derby.

The show required much planning and the leasing of barges, tugboats and docking space to unload the fireworks.

Clair said he expects the Charleston harbor will be filled with thousands of boats for the show.

The public will be able to view the show from as far away as James Island.

"Folks who can see the bridge will be able to see the fireworks," Clair said. "It's going to be large enough that you don't have to be right next to it."

Once the fireworks show ends, the bridge's aesthetic lighting system will be turned on for the first time.

"Once the aesthetic lighting is turned on and you get a view of the bridge at night, it's going to add so much to the character of Charleston and the harbor," Clair said.

On Saturday morning, the 2-hour opening ceremony dedicating the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge will be co-chaired by Commissioners Harrell and Truluck at mid-span. Details and the agenda were being finalized as The Connector went to press.

There will be seating available for 3,000 at the ceremony. Given that it will likely be a very warm day, Clair expects turnout for the ceremony to be far less than the two public days.

The ceremony will culminate with the ribbon cutting and the processional across the bridge.

The Cooper River Bridge



Rickie Green of the SCDOT Community Bridge Office



Workers prepare to an electrical box as part of the bridge's intelligent transportation system.



Workers pour the sidewalk for the bicycle and pedestrian lane on the Mount Pleasant side of the bridge.

The countdown has begun to opening the new Cooper River Bridge.



Bridge workers put the finishing touches on one of the strands of cable.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROB THOMPSON/THE CONNECTOR

The opening of the new Cooper River Bridge has been set for July 16.



A worker guides a work platform down after crews sandblast the towers.



LEFT: Crew members place the last piece of the bridge deck in place.

BELOW: Workers place striping down on the northbound lanes of the new bridge.



An electrician connects wires to install lighting on the bridge deck.



OPENING CEREMONY SCHEDULE

The Opening Committee for the New Cooper River Bridge is pleased to announce that the dedication and opening date for the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge has been set for Saturday, July 16th, 2005.

The dedication and opening of the bridge will be preceded by a week long celebration marking the significance of this historical opening.

Celebratory events will include two public afternoons on Saturday, July 9 and Sunday, July 10. The public will be invited to come and walk or run on the bridge.

Weather permitting, there is a fundraising event scheduled for Monday night on July 11 to defray some of the costs of the opening festivities.

Weather permitting, there will be a grand, thirty-minute fireworks display across the Cooper River prior to the ceremonial first lighting of the bridge's cables the night of Thursday, July 14.

On Saturday morning, July 16th, The Bridge Opening and Dedication to Arthur Ravenel Jr. will start at 9 a.m. on the bridge's main span, between the diamond towers. This event will be open to the public. Upon the conclusion of this dedication, the bridge will be open to vehicular and pedestrian/bicycle traffic.