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# SALES BOOM

*Despite being  
illegal, firework  
sales show no  
signs of decline*



Rock Port, Mo. -- Larry Flanagan sits on a rickety home-made bench outside of his Liberty Fireworks store here and slowly smokes a cigarette.

He looks northward, down over the hill and to where about four or five fireworks stores, not stands, anchor the intersection between Interstate 29 and U.S. Highway 136. Perched on the awning above Flanagan is a giant, blown up caricature balloon of Uncle Sam.

It is a traditional representation -- big hat, wide goofy eyes, white goatee, a chiseled face and an even more chiseled demeanor. Below the mammoth synthetic representation of American pride stands Flanagan, surprisingly with some of the same characteristics -- at least the wide goofy eyes and chiseled demeanor. Flanagan, however, stands at about 5-foot-4, has a beer gut, some obvious dental work, thick square glasses and a weird half-jerry-curl half-stringy comb-over hairdo. Either way, for many Nebraskans, both Uncle Sam and Flanagan represent the same thing -- Liberty.

According to Ken Winters, a spokesman for the Nebraska State Fire Marshall, the official definition of illegal fireworks for Nebraska is "anything that leaves the ground and comes back hot." Of course this vague definition leaves out things like fountains, Roman candles, ground flowers and other projectiles. This definition does, however, prohibit a large number of fireworks from being sold or used in Nebraska, so many people just drive to the more fireworks friendly state of Missouri to get their thrill. And as the saying goes, Missouri loves company.

Despite being a rainy Tuesday in June, the parking lot of Liberty Fireworks is a crowded, eclectic mix of automobiles. There's a silver Honda Accord, a rusted out El Camino, a gray Chevy minivan and even a yellow Mitsubishi sports car. Of the 16 cars in the lot, two have Missouri license plates and four are from Iowa. The rest are Nebraskan. The building itself looks like it used to be a drive-in restaurant, and the people going in look like they're as hungry as the people going into the McDonalds' on the other side of I-29. Of course, they leave with an entirely different kind

Please see **FIREWORKS** on 4