

Yesterday, it was cake, ice cream and birthday candles. Dessert first at the Philadelphia Freedom Festival.

Today, the city's four-day Fourth of July celebration moves on to the main course with the Restaurant Festival at Penn's Landing.

From noon to 10 p.m., about 20 area eateries will sell their specialties at the Great Plaza on the Delaware.

Delilah's, from the Reading Terminal Market, will offer ribs and chopped beef and pork sandwiches. The Middle East Restaurant will roast a pig and slice it for sandwiches, and will also serve sausage-and-peppers sandwiches. Also on the menu are ribs, burgers, french fries and buffalo wings from H.A. Winston & Co.; egg rolls, lomein, chicken wings, fried rice and cashew shrimp

from the Golden Pearl in Exton, and steak sandwiches from Lee's Hoagie House.

The food will be accompanied by musical entertainment from 1:45 to 6 p.m. Among the performers: the Chris Day Band, the Cross Harp Sharp Blues Review, the Appreciation Choir, the Santa Fe Blues Band and jazz singer Regina Rose.

Tomorrow, waterfront music featuring rhythm-and-bluesman Ben E. King and jazz and pop artist Gloria Lynne, as well as recorded classics from the 1950s and '60s, will begin at noon on Penn's Landing. Performances will end at 9 p.m.

The big event tomorrow is the Great American Balloon Race. The launch is at 6 p.m. at Diamond Field, 22d Street and the Parkway. Last year, there were 13 balloons, representing the 13 original colonies. No word yet on how many will make the Center City-to-New Jersey circuit this year.

Tomorrow's finale will be the Two Cities Two States Spectacular, featuring fireworks and a laser light show set to patriotic music, to celebrate the link between Philadelphia and Camden. There are two places to watch: the Great Plaza on Penn's Landing and Ulysses S. Wiggins Waterfront Park in Camden. The show begins about 9:40 p.m.

Sunday is just for youngsters. Clowns, jugglers, a bubble-blowing contest, storytelling and countless other forms of entertainment for little people will fill the Great Plaza from noon to 6 p.m.

Here are some highlights.

- * Please Touch Museum: arts and crafts.
- * Free Library: bookmarks, puppets and storytelling.
- * MetroKids Magazine: balloon sculpturing.
- * Shriners Hospital: make your own bumper sticker.
- * **Grand Hank** Productions/National Organization of Black Chemists: rap contest and science Q & A.
- * Philadelphia SPCA: dogs, cats and information on adoption.
- * Philadelphia College of Optometry: vision screening.
- * Academy of Natural Sciences: dinosaur beanbag toss.
- * Anti-Graffiti Network: mural painting.

The Up With People singers will perform at 1 and 4 p.m. Sunday.

Among the youngsters attending Sunday's Kids' Day and the other Freedom Festival events will be 50 teenagers from Philadelphia's sister city, Philadelphia, Miss. For some, the bus trip and four-day stay here will be their first excursion out of their home state.

They also will tour historic Philadelphia, the Franklin Institute and the Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum.

For information on Freedom Festival events, call 686-2876 or 923-2061.