

Not everyone comes to Washington in the springtime to beg for bailout money, gloat about multi-million-dollar bonus rip-offs or to lobby Congress for special hometown pork barrel deals. For nearly 100 years, residents and visitors have had more important things to do. They stroll out into the sunlit D.C. streets to wonder at clouds of bright red that have descended on the Nation's capital city. There they enjoy the annual Cherry Blossom Festival, with week-long events until Sunday, April 12.

The 2009 National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade starts festivities on Saturday, April 4, running from 10 am to noon. The colorful and musical procession struts along Constitution Avenue from 7th to 17th Streets, NW. Every minute, crowds of kids and young-at-heart viewers can thrill to giant theme balloons, tuneful marching bands and circus-act performers.

Who will head the festivities as Grand Marshal? You'll need to give a guess answer before you can answer the question: name the host of the popular TV program, Jeopardy. The question is, who is Alex Trebek? Before the parade, Alex will hold tryouts for the program at Washington's Montgomery College.

If Alex isn't enough for onlookers, the nation's top looker, Katie Stam, Miss America 2009 will be on her own float in the parade. Musical star performers will include Kimberley Locke, Thelma Houston, Davonda Simmons and Joey Page.

Students from the Creative and Performing Arts High School in Philadelphia will perform "Cant' Stop Dancin," accompanied by the All Star Flag Team and the D.C. Roller Derby Skaters. Other musical presentations will include Broadway ensembles doing show tunes from "Chicago" and "Mamma Mia".

If you plan to be in D.C. in early April, after you've cussed out your Senator and Congressperson, you'll be sure to return to a happy mood when you go out to watch the festivities and then stroll among the brilliant cherry tree blossoms.

