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THE HOPE WATERMELON FESTIVAL IS BACK AND BETTER THAN EVER!

After the cancellation of last year's festival due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hope Watermelon Festival is ready to return for its 45th festival with even more to do than ever before.

Chamber of Commerce Director Beckie Moore says, "It is invigorating to have the festival back and I am excited for people to see what's in store."

"It is hard to believe that this will be our 45th Annual Hope Watermelon Festival," she said. "Due to the cancelation of the festival in 2020, this year's gathering will be special. The festival makes a huge economic impact on our community. To know that hotels will be filled, restaurants will, once again, welcome a great number of tourists, and stores will be able to see a difference in foot traffic the weekend of the festival makes all of the long hours in planning well worth it!"

Moore says that there will be more food to eat than ever before at the festival with a record number of food trucks and vendors set to be in attendance. "Due to cancelation of the festival in 2020, we have seen a huge increase in the number of vendors and concessions applying to participate in the festival," she said. "We have 19 food trucks and 130 vendors, which could possibly increase if we find the space. We are also preparing for overflow parking this year."

The Kidz Zone will also look a little differently, "We continually look for ways to add to the excitement from the previous year or years," Moore said. "Therefore, we have added activities in the Kidz Zone that would attract young children, as well as teenagers."

Moore says that visitors at the festival should be excited to get out and have fun with all the new activities that will be included.

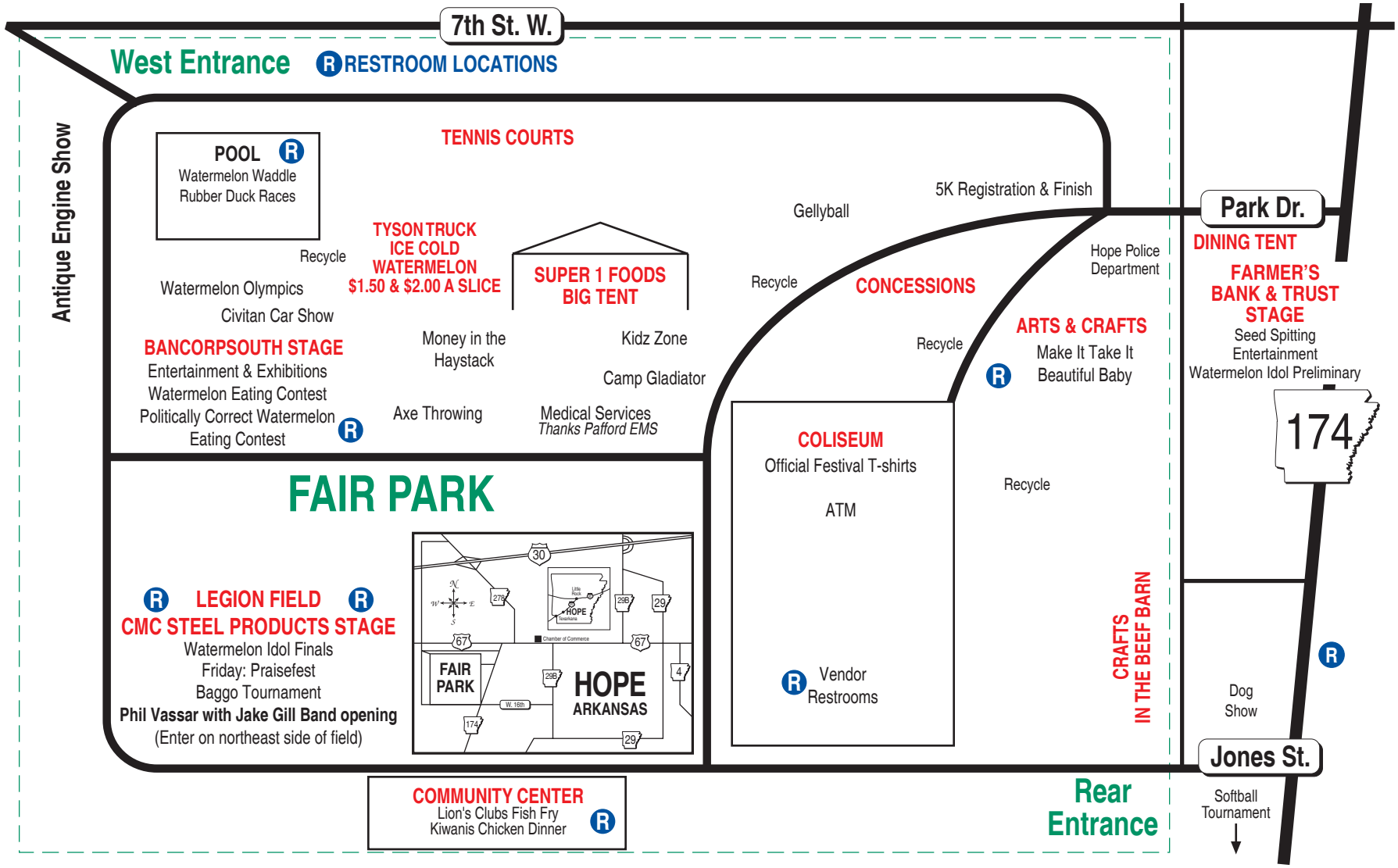
"We have added quite a few new activities and food trucks this year," she said. "GellyBall, a Make It & Take It Craft Area, Axe Throwing, and Camp Gladiator to name a few. Food trucks will offer Italian, Mexican, Cajun, and Greek, along with festival food favorites (funnel cakes, ice cream, kettle corn, and fruit teas)."

Moore is also excited about the return of festival favorites.

"I'm thrilled to see the return of all of the events which are fan-favorites (softball, 5K, car show, baggo tournament, & duck waddle plus much, much more!)," she said. "I'm very excited that our Hope Watermelons will be shared with thousands who join us this year! We are definitely thankful for our farmers who grow melons!"

Moore says that the Watermelon Festival could not happen without the help from people who help plan the festival each and every year.

"The history of the Hope Watermelon Festival makes each year all the more special," she said. "We have so many people to thank as we plan each year's festival. We like to pause and remember those who have gone before us in creating a festival that is well-loved in Arkansas and beyond."



Beat The Heat - Watermelon Style

While participating in fun activities and attending all the grand events of the Watermelon Festival, it is important to do so safely and with care during these hot, summer days. Here are a few tips to help you and your family stay cool and healthy while still having a great time!

- Stay hydrated!! Drink lots of water to help replenish what your body is losing while you sweat and to also help your body temperature cool off and prevent overheating. Foods high in water content, such as watermelon and other fruits, can help with this, too.
- Wear protective clothing and accessories to keep your body from overheating and safe from harmful UV rays. Lightweight hats with breathable mesh, lightweight shirts and shorts, and sunglasses with UV protection are all great options.
- Take breaks in the shade or an air conditioned building as often as possible. The coliseum and the arts and crafts building are good choices.
- Know the signs of heat-related illnesses. Pafford Medical Services will be stationed around the park. Seek assistance when experiencing any of the following: confusion, dizziness, vomiting, excessive thirst, headache, fainting, weakness, excessive sweating, extremely high body temperature, or weak pulse. Hot dry skin can be a symptom of a heat stroke while cold, damp skin can be a sign of heat exhaustion. Listen to your body and pay attention to the signs and symptoms it shows you!

Thursday, August 5

Noon — **FESTIVAL OPENS**
Vendors/Exhibitors — Coliseum
Concessions — Horticulture Pavilion Outside
Inflatables — T-Mobile Kidz Zone
Pony Rides
NEW! Camp Gladiator, Gellyball, Axe Throwing, Face Painting, Fun Photo Boots, HPSD Reading Bus, Little Tykes Town, Game Area: Corn Hole, Connect Four, Jenga
NEW! T-Mobile Charging Station
NEW! Make It/Take It — Arts & Crafts Barn

4:30 pm — **Watermelon Idol** — Farmers Bank & Trust Stage
Sponsored by UAHT, Casey Curtis—Chair

4:30 pm-7 pm — **Kiwanis BBQ Chicken Supper** — Community Room

5 pm — **Watermelon by the Slice** — Big Tent

5:30 pm — **Watermelon Olympics** — Area Behind BancorpSouth Stage

6 pm — **Watermelon Contest Weigh-In** — Coliseum Lobby

6 pm — **Cheridy Adams** — Farmers Bank & Trust Stage

6:30 pm — **Dog Show** — Swine Barn
Sponsored by Byreview Vet Clinic, Dr. Damien Stroderd

6:30 pm — **Baggo Tournament** — Legion Field
Summer Powell, Chair

Friday, August 6

9 am — **FESTIVAL OPENS**
Vendors/Exhibitors
Kidz Zone — T-Mobile Kidz Zone Area
Kidz Zone & Tyke Town Sponsor: T-Mobile
Pony Rides (Friday/Saturday)
Camel Rides (Friday/Saturday)
(Some exhibitors and concessions may open at 10:30 AM & remain open until the final music act at 10:00 PM)

10 am — **Watermelon by the Slice Opens** — Big Tent
Sponsored by Super 1 & Hope Auto

10:30 am — **Concessions Open**

11:30 am — **Jennifer Taylor** — Farmers Bank & Trust Stage

1:30 pm — **Soul Unlimited Show Band** — Farmers Bank & Trust Stage

3:30 pm — **Dylan Murray** — Farmers Bank & Trust Stage

4:30 pm-7 pm — **Lion's Club Fish Fry** — Community Room

5 pm — **Blackwater Bayou** — Farmers Bank & Trust Stage

6 pm — **Washington Vintage Dancers** — In front of Coliseum

6 pm — **Gates Open** — Legion Field
7 pm — **Praisefest (FREE CONCERT)**
6:45 pm — **Williams Sisters, Jenny Taylor**
Williams Sisters/Arnetta Bradford
HEADLINER: CRUTCHFIELD

Saturday, August 7

7:30 am — **Watermelon 5K**
RRCA 2021 Grand Prix Series XXXX — Fair Park Gate
Race to start at 6th & Mockingbird
Don Still, Chairman, 870-777-1917/still1@sbcglobal.net

8 am — **Civitan Antique & Classic Car Show**
Behind BancorpSouth Stage
Hope Civitan Club; $25 Entry Fee; Registration 8 am-11 am, 870-648-5084

9 am — **Rusty Wheels Engine Show Opens**

9 am — **Vendors/Exhibitors Open**

9 am — **Fishing Derby** — Huckabee Lake
Robin Lee, Chairman

9 am — **Kidz Zone Opens** — T-Mobile Kidz Zone

9 am — **Kid's Characters on Stage** — BancorpSouth Stage
Mickey, Chase & Baby Shark

10 am — **Money In the Haystack** — Near Big Tent
Sponsored & Chaired by Heather Doucet State Farm Insurance

10 am — **Watermelon by the Slice** — Big Tent

11 am — **Politically Correct Watermelon Eating Contest**
Sponsored & Chaired by UAHT — BancorpSouth Stage

11:30 am — **Watermelon Auction in the BIG Tent**

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Noon — **Watermelon Eating Contest** — BancorpSouth Stage
All Ages
Sponsored & Chaired by UAHT

Noon — **Piano Man Jack** — Farmers Bank & Trust Stage

1:30-3:30 pm — **Seed Spitting Competition** — Farmers Bank & Trust Stage
Dave Phillips, Chairman

2 pm — **Rick Sorea** — BancorpSouth Stage

2:30 pm — **Watermelon Waddle Duck Races** — Swimming Pool
Sponsored & Chaired by Manpower

3 pm — **Carl Jackson** — BancorpSouth Stage

3:30 pm — **Hope Piranhas Swim Team Exhibition** — Swimming Pool

4 pm — **Southwest Arkansas Taekwondo Demonstration** — BancorpSouth Stage

4 pm — **Nighthawk** — Farmers Bank & Trust Stage

6 pm — **Gate Opens** — **Legion Field**
Armbands will be provided so everyone may enjoy the concessions and return to the concert.
Watermelon Idol Finals
Opening: Jake Gill Band
Phil Vassar

FESTIVAL CLOSES AFTER CONCERT

Remember: Festival Treasure Hunt August 2
The Softball Tournament & Golf Tournament
will be taking place as well as all activities listed above.
Visit **www.hopemelonfest.com** to register for the 5K Run/Walk, Melon Mile, Watermelon Idol, Baggo Tournament and Car Show. Pick up Watermelon Olympics and Baggo Tournament Entry Forms at the Chamber.

To purchase Diamond Rio Tickets, visit the Hope-Hempstead County Chamber Office or buy online at uacch.edu/Diamond Rio.
Tickets: Adult $15.00 & Children (4-10) $6.00
Day of Event $20.00 • Reserved $40.00
If you have any questions, please call the Chamber at 870-777-3640

A SLICE OF WATERMELON HISTORY

The Annual Watermelon Festival has evolved into a staple for the City of Hope, attracting upwards of 20,000 visitors to the city each year. However, as popular as the event has become, some may not know just how far back the origins of the famous Hope Watermelon Festival go.

The origins of the Hope Watermelon Festival can be traced back as far as 1916 when John S. Gibson, a pharmacist and owner of the Gibson Drug Store who also sold watermelon seeds, started hosting a competition to promote the economy. In these competitions, Gibson would offer prizes for whoever could grow the largest vegetables and, more specifically, the largest watermelons. This competition caught the attention of Hope farmers Hugh and Edgar Laseter who would go on to develop a watermelon seed line in an attempt to win the competition. Hugh was successful with this, and on Aug. 12, 1925 he grew a 136-pound watermelon, Arkansas's first giant watermelon. This watermelon generated a lot of excitement in the community, which would lead to the first Watermelon Festival the following year in 1926.

In the early days of the festival, the Hope Chamber of Commerce would host a one-day festival every year where citizens of Hope

would serve watermelons to the train passengers that rode through and/or stopped in the city. The 1920's festivals would also host a Watermelon Queen pageant, plus a large parade with decorated cars, floats, and bands to go along with the serving of the watermelons. The festival would end with dances in the Elks Hall, a skating rink, or in the streets.

All three of these events would bring around 20,000 individuals to Hope in just one day, and in 1928 the festival brought in a whopping 30,000 people! Visitors from all over the area, including some from Little Rock, Shreveport, and Oklahoma, would attend the festivities. Loudspeakers were even borrowed from companies in Little Rock to broadcast the festival to the large gathering of people. Major entertainment studios like Fox, Pathe, Paramount, and Metro-Goldwyn Mayer News (MGM) would arrive in Hope and film some of the events to show in movie theaters across the country.

This annual celebration and young tradition for Hope soon came to an end, however, with the arrival of the Great Depression. With the City of Hope suffering economic distress just like the rest of the nation, the town could no longer accommodate the large crowds that the festival attracted each year, so it had to be ended. The festival was briefly brought back for one year in 1935, however, when a farmer named Oscar D. Middlebrooks grew a 195-pound watermelon near Patmos. This record-breaking watermelon was shipped around the

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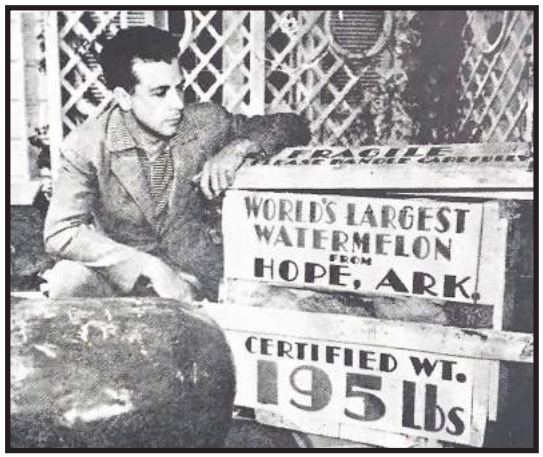
A SLICE OF WATERMELON HISTORY

country and ended up in the possession of many famous people including the 30th President of the United States Calvin Cooledge and Arkansas-born movie star Dick Powell.

It wasn't until 1975, when the City of Hope celebrated its centennial, that word of reviving the famous Watermelon festival from decades before began to spread. The centennial celebration was a massive success, so much so that local newspaperman C.M. "Pod" Rogers convinced the Hope Chamber of Commerce to organize and sponsor the new Watermelon Festival in 1977. The success of this revival led to the festival becoming an annual event.

The revived Watermelon Festival really started gaining national attention after Ivan and Lloyd Bright grew the first-ever 200-pound watermelon in 1979, breaking the 44 year old record previously held by Middlebrooks. Only six years later, in 1985, Lloyd's 10 year old son, Jason L. Bright, produced a 260-pound watermelon which would go on to be recorded in the 1992 Guinness Book of World Records. This record wouldn't be broken until Sept. 3, 2005, when Lloyd Bright would grow a 268.8-pound watermelon.

Today, the festival is a huge success and one of the biggest attractions the community of Hope has to offer. Hope might be a small town, but this town and its citizens know how to celebrate big! Plus, they most certainly know how to grow those big, sweet, juicy watermelons!



AXE THROWING, JUST ONE OF THE NEW EVENTS THIS YEAR

This year's Watermelon Festival will be featuring a brand new activity for guests to enjoy where they can sharpen their skills with a little axe throwing.

The Kilt-South Arkansas Axe Throwing is a company based in El Dorado, Arkansas and will be coming to the festival to teach guests a little thing or two about the new and exciting activity of axe throwing. "Axe throwing is growing in popularity," Chamber of Commerce director Beckie Moore said. "Just as dart throwing was popular in restaurants, axe throwing is now happening inside restaurants and other venues." Moore is very excited to have Kilt-South Arkansas Axe Throwing join the Hope Watermelon Festival this year.

Kilt-South Arkansas Axe Throwing will provide a few lessons for anyone who is interested in participating and wants to step inside the cage to throw an axe. The owners have been managing axe throwing for some time, so they know how to proceed in a safe and efficient way. The set up is cage-like and they guide folks

through each step of the process while offering advice on varying techniques. They have the complete and safe set-up already available, so all that axe throwers will need to learn is how to throw an axe. Youngsters can participate, as well, but only with a parent or legal guardian present.

Kilt-South Arkansas Axe Throwing proprietor, Anglea Thomas, says she and co-owner/husband, Ryan, are looking forward to joining the line-up of events at the Watermelon Festival. "We are super excited to be joining the Festival this year," said Thomas. "We love having the competitions and teaching people about axe throwing. We can't wait to bring it to the people of Hope and all visitors of the Watermelon Festival."

Anyone interested in trying out this new activity can join in the fun at the Kilt-South Arkansas Axe Throwing booth located on the Fairgrounds starting at noon on Thursday, August 5.

WATERMELON HOTSPOTS AROUND TOWN!

There are plenty of watermelons to be found all around the festival if you have a hankering for a sweet, juicy treat, but what if you are somewhere else in town and just can't wait? These are the local sellers and stands, plus locations, of famous Hope watermelons!

Saunders Stand - Intersection of S. Main & Hwy 29

Bodcaw Watermelons: David McNiel - 1302 N. Hervey across from Dollar Tree.

V&C Farms - N. Hervey in front of Heather Doucet State Farm

Bingham Stand - Hwy 29 S - a mile past UAHT

Chris England Stand - N. Hervey across from Ivan Smith

Barry's Grocery & Market 301 East 2nd St.

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AINSLEY'S ANGELS TO JOIN 5K

This year's Watermelon Festival 5K is ready to go with a new organization providing help for those who traditionally wouldn't be able to participate.

Ainsley's Angels is set to participate in the Watermelon 5K for the first time this year. Ainsley's Angels is a national organization based in Virginia, but entirely funded by local donations. They aim to ensure that anyone, regardless of their handicaps, can participate in endurance events. "Ainsley's Angels provides athletic equipment and organizes able-bodied running teams to help anyone needing accommodations to complete an endurance event," Tessa Dean, the Southwest Arkansas

Ainsley's Angels ambassador, said. "Regardless of age, sex, or ability level, we believe that these races are opportunities for the community to come together, so we provide the means to insure that all are welcome, and 'all' truly means all."

Dean has always dreamed of having Ainsley's Angels participate in the Watermelon 5K here in Hope and almost got the opportunity last year before the COVID-19 pandemic hit and canceled it. "I've wanted to do the Watermelon 5K, but in the past it has conflicted with our Ark Angel 5K, part of the Ainsley's Angels' race series put on by the Northwest AR ambassador

in Ft Smith," she said. "I committed to bringing our chariots and the athletes able to travel that far to participate in that event, in addition to the awards banquet and family day with the Arkansas Naturals. Last year, COVID stood in the way, so I'm excited that after nearly three years, we can roll in this local event and spread inclusion within Hope."

Dean says that working as an ambassador for the company has been a real joy and dream come true. "As an ambassador, I get to see inclusion in action through the smiles and joy brought by bridging the gap between the special needs community and the community at

large," she said. "I love hearing follow-up stories from our volunteers and runners about situations like seeing one of our athletes at Walmart and having the common ground and comfort level to approach them because of our organization. It might just be one 5K, but the ripple effects of belonging spread long after the race is done."

The Watermelon Festival 5K will take place Saturday, August 7 at 7:30 am. All are invited to cheer on the runners and support the race, and if you see an Ainsley's Angels runner, be sure to say hello!

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To ensure you and your family fully enjoy your festival experience, remember these following tips:
-Find Shade
-Stay Hydrated
-Apply Sunscreen!

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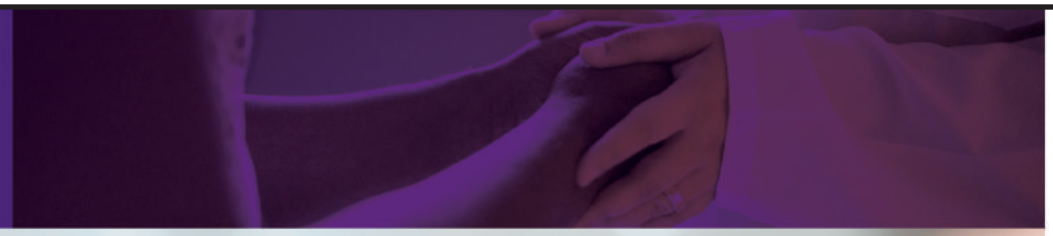

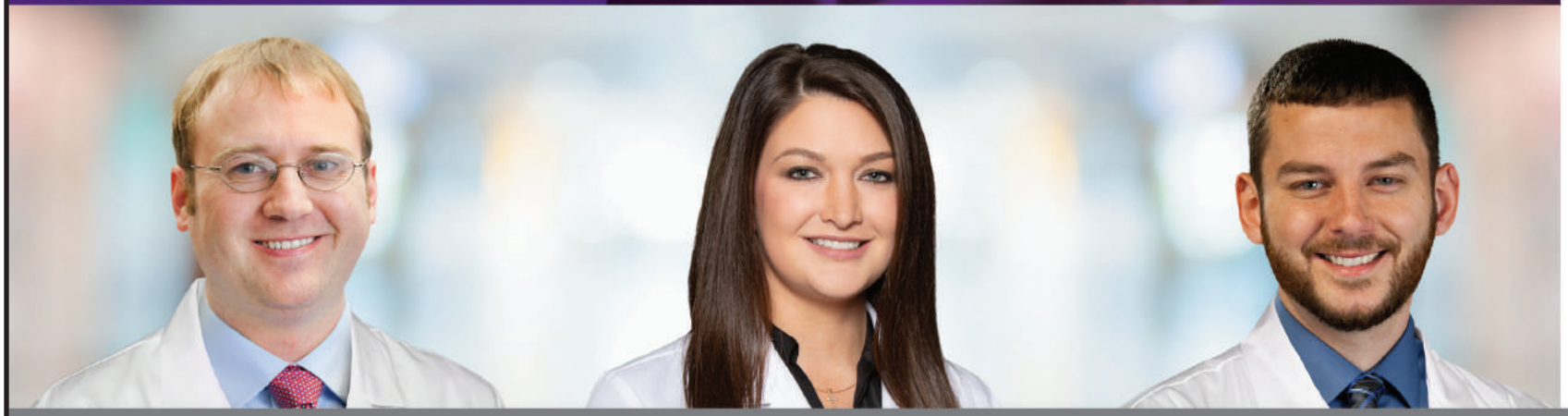

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GELLYBALL, A NEW ACTIVITY

A new activity is coming to the Hope Watermelon Festival this year in the form of a new spin on a classic game that all ages can enjoy: GellyBall. Similar to paintball, Gellyball will have participants carry around Gellyguns that shoot a gel-like ball at their opponents in a 40ft x 80ft area. "It is a lot like paintball but it does not hurt and it does not stain clothing so parents don't have to worry about that if their children want to have some fun with it," Chamber of Commerce director Beckie Moore said.

The GellyBall court will be housed between the Kidz Zone and the concessions area and will be available to play every single day during the Festival. The area only allows for 10 to 12 players at a time and is only available for ages six and up. Teens and adults are also welcome to play. "Folks love to play paintball; so this new 'twist' to that game offers as much fun, but it does not harm the player or the clothing," Moore said. "Bottom line – gellyball is a great activity for any festival or event."

We hope you enjoy your time at the 45th Annual Watermelon Festival!
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CRUTCHFIELD HEADLINES FRIDAY NIGHT PRAISE FEST

The Watermelon Festival will be having a new, Christian celebration to help conclude the festival this year in the form of Friday Night Praise Fest. Praise Fest will take place on the Friday of the festival at the CMC Steel Products stage on Legion Field, with gates opening at 6 pm. "Just one of many ideas that came into play as a result of not having the festival last year," Chamber of Commerce director Beckie Moore said. "The festival needs to include activities and events that are crowd favorites year after year, but it also needs to add new and exciting aspects each year to keep the festival fresh." The idea originated from Velora Bright Haltom who planned a praise service at the coliseum during the conclusion of the Festival many years ago.

"Several local pastors are coming together to help plan and implement PraiseFest," Moore said. "2020 was a difficult year for everyone so PraiseFest is an evening filled with praise and celebration for all that is ahead of us! The concert is free for all who choose to attend, but people will need to bring their lawn chairs."

The Williams Sisters, Jenny Taylor, and Arnetta Bradford will open the event with a local band from Malvern called Crutchfield headlining the event. Bradford, owner of local Christian cafe Hebrews 11:1, has performed at other celebrations of worship and said this event is not one to be missed. "The Praisefest will be amazing," said Bradford, "we just want to bring a little positivity, joy and uplifting worship to people at the festival."

Crutchfield is based out of Malvern, Arkansas and has mixed genres in it's wheelhouse, but each has one thing in common: a spiritual message put out to help bring spiritual joyfulness and praise. "Being a little rock, a little pop, and even a bit of grassroots, Crutch-

CRUTCHFIELD HEADLINES FRIDAY NIGHT PRAISE FEST

field is a sound that all generations will sing along with," the band's press release said.

The band members are Matt Crutchfield, who sings lead vocals and plays acoustic guitar, Adam Parker, who plays drums and percussion, Adam Crutchfield, who plays bass guitar and sings vocals, Cody Howell, who plays rhythm guitar, and Jason Sutton, who plays keyboards and sings vocals.

Anyone who wants to participate in Praisefest and enjoy the spiritually joyous concert, be at CMC stage on Legion Field with a lawn chair Friday night at 6 pm.

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PHIL VASSAR TO TAKE THE STAGE AS HEADLINER

This year's headliner for the 45th Annual Watermelon Festival concert will be country artist Phil Vassar. The Watermelon Festival will be one of Vassar's first performances since the COVID-19 pandemic hit and he's excited to perform for all of Hope and its visitors. "The last year and a half I haven't gotten to play anything so I'm excited to come out and see you guys," Vassar said. "The Watermelon Festival will be one of my first shows, so it will be a lot of fun." Vassar says that he doesn't quite know what songs he will be performing at the Festival, yet; he'll determine that based on the audience's vibe. "I like it when the crowd is involved," he said. "It's just a win-win. You get everybody in the crowd having a good time and I want everybody involved in the show when I play."

Vassar has a small connection with Hope. Vassar has performed for the White House four times and has gotten to meet every president since George H. W. Bush, including Hope-born President Bill Clinton. "We were actually doing an event together," Vassar said. "I tried to get him to play the sax with me but he had to leave. It was still great to meet him, though."

Vassar was born in Virginia and attended James Madison University where he majored in business, something that he says has been very beneficial to his career so far. "I just wanted to have a business background, and I'm glad I did," he said. "I feel blessed and pretty lucky to have this now; a bunch of my music friends don't and it hasn't worked to their advantage."

After graduating from college, Vassar moved out to Nashville to start his music career. "I started playing clubs and bars, and then I bought my own bar and a restaurant. After that, I wrote a bunch of hits for several guys like Tim McGraw," he said. "I finally got a record deal in 1998, and had my first single out in 1999. It's been rock-n-roll ever since."

Vassar says that music has always been a part of his life and always will be. "I've always wanted to be a songwriter and singer," he said. "I grew up in a musical family and I just always knew what I wanted to do."

Vassar is excited to attend the Watermelon Festival beyond just his performance. "They will have watermelon there, won't they?" he laughs. "I love that stuff!"

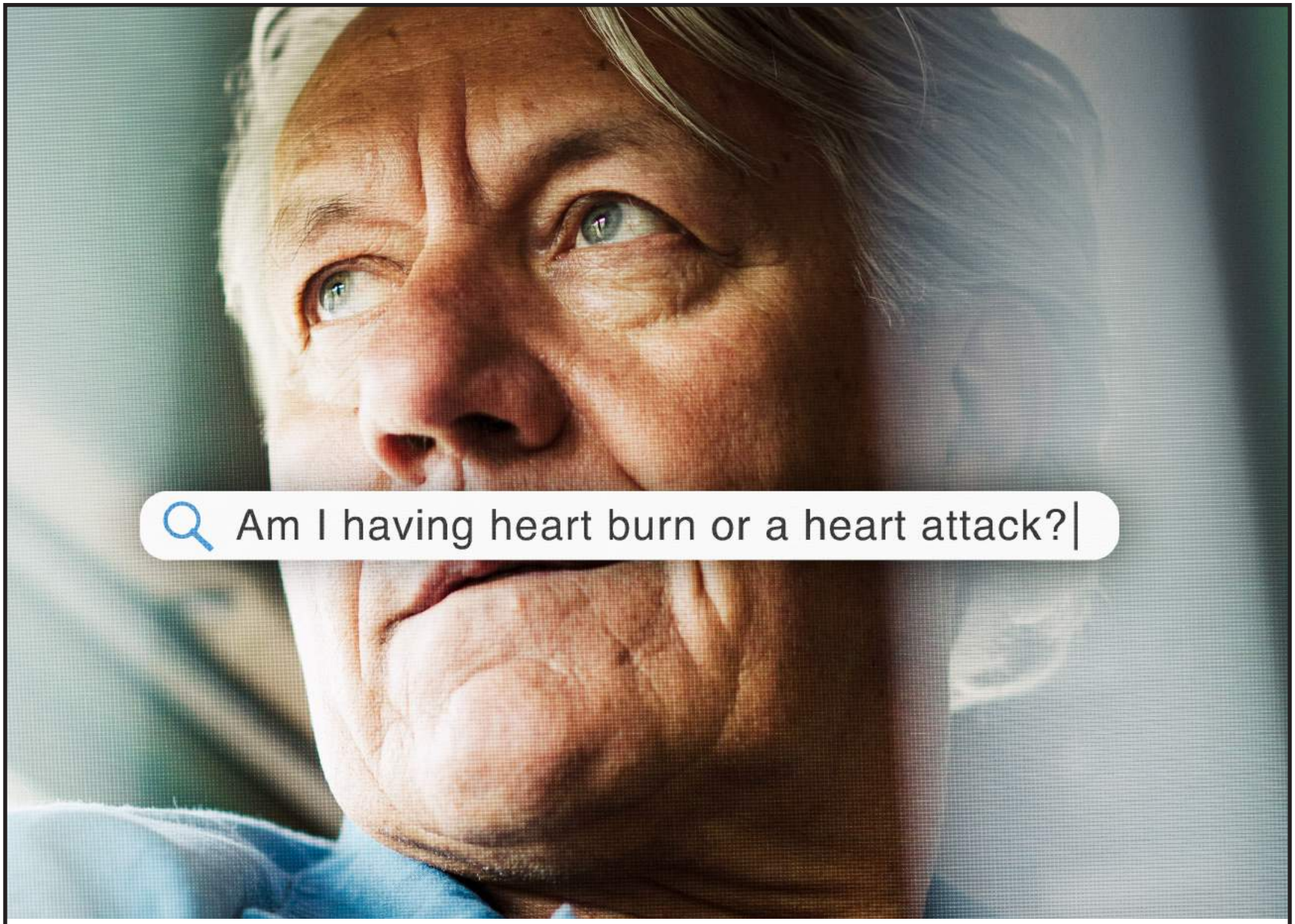
Vassar's reign of signature songs includes 10 Number One singles and 26 Top 40 hits including "Carlene," "Just

PHIL VASSAR TO TAKE THE STAGE AS HEADLINER

Another Day in Paradise," "Six-Pack Summer," "When I Love You," and many more.

Vassar was racking up hits on the radio long before he even began his own recording career that has seen the release of six albums, two ASCAP Songwriter of the Year trophies, ACM's Top New Male Vocalist, and sold-out shows across the country.

Phill Vassar will share his exceptional talent at the 45th Annual Watermelon Festival Saturday, August 7. The show will be held on the CMC Stage inside Hope Fair Park. Gates open at 6:00 p.m. Tickets can be bought at the event itself for $20. For a discount, buy tickets ahead of time at the Hope-Hempstead County Chamber Office or online at UAHT.edu.



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