

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 19, 2026

Hope Fest 2026 Shatters Records, Raising \$168,572 to Support Herrin House of Hope's 15th Year and Phase 2 Expansion



HERRIN, IL — The 15th annual Hope Fest, held this past weekend on the grounds of Community of Faith Church in Marion, has officially concluded as a historic milestone for Southern Illinois. Thanks to the overwhelming generosity of our community, Hope Fest 2026 shattered all previous fundraising records, bringing in a grand total of **\$168,572**.

This remarkable achievement marks incredible growth for the festival, significantly surpassing the \$96,600 raised in 2024 and the \$95,500 raised in 2025. This year, an amazing coalition of 60 sponsors contributed \$155,450 to the cause. Over the course of the two-day festival, an additional \$13,122 was raised on-site through admissions, food sales, activities, and generous donations.

Special Recognitions & Major Gifts A special thanks goes out to **Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois**, represented by Kim Wade Morse, for an amazing \$25,000 grant. Furthermore, Will Davis, Regional President for **Deaconess Illinois**, presented a remarkably generous gift of \$20,000. Rev. Dr. Troy D. Benitone, President of Southern Illinois House of Hope, said *“Both of these gifts are so greatly needed and will go a long way toward alleviating food hunger and insecurity, while giving lasting hope to the people of Southern Illinois.”* **(Photos of both check presentations are attached at the end).*

Driving the Mission Forward: Year 15 & Phase 2 Expansion Every dollar raised helps fuel the life-changing, daily ministry of the Herrin House of Hope as it officially enters its 15th year of operations. Over the past 14 years, the organization has been a beacon of support for the region, providing over 476,000 hot meals, serving 50,000 individuals through its emergency pantry, feeding 35,000 free summer meals to children, and supporting more than 250 students through GED and job training programs.

The funds from Hope Fest 2026 will not only sustain these critical daily operations but will also go a long way in supporting our highly anticipated **Phase 2 Project**. This ambitious expansion includes the new Hope Community Wellness GAP Clinic, the Hope Emergency Shelter, and a state-of-the-art Commodities Distribution Center at 116 N. 14th St. in Herrin, designed to better serve vulnerable families in our area.

A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Community An event of this magnitude is only possible through the dedication of our community. We want to extend our deepest gratitude to every sponsor, 5K runner, Auto & Bike Show participant, Hope Fest Market vendor, and every single festival-goer who came out to celebrate. A special thank you goes out to the Carterville Lion High School Cheer Squad and the Herrin High School Tiger Marching Band for bringing such incredible spirit and energy to the weekend.

To everyone who served, volunteered, and attended—**THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THE HERRIN HOUSE OF HOPE- God is good!**

Official Hope Fest 2026 Sponsors: Our final report proudly recognizes 60 sponsors who made this record-breaking year possible. Notably, our Hope Fest Named Event Sponsors (gifts of \$5,000 or greater) accounted for an astounding \$122,150 of the funds raised.

Hope Fest Named Event Sponsors (\$5,000+)

1. Ai
2. Meridian Health Plan of Illinois
3. Enterprise Mobility- Fill Your Tank®
4. East Side Lumberyard Supply- Don Reis Jr.
5. Deaconess
6. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois
7. Walmart- Herrin, Marion, Murphy, DuQuoin, Carbondale & Harrisburg
8. Generous Anonymous Donor
9. Ascension Roofing
10. Swinford Media Group
11. Just Plain Nonsense- Rob Rindfuss
12. Black Diamond Family of Businesses/Oasis Powersports
13. Modern Woodmen of America
14. Mark & Melissa Elston on behalf of Landon Elston

Hope Fest Event Sponsors (\$2,500+)

1. Sam's Club, Marion- Phil Julia, GM
2. Community of Faith Church
3. Produce Perform- Lucas Winkler

Hope Fest Major Sponsors (\$1,000+)

1. Genesis Personal Healthcare Medicine- Gritz Pierre, MD, MBA
2. Herrin Women Club
3. SIU Credit Union
4. West Monroe Apostolic Church
5. Cornerstone Church- Pastor Jason Thrash
6. Crown Brew Coffee Co.
7. Silkworm, Inc
8. Shirts for Vets- Sean Dillard
9. Integrity Roofing & Exteriors- Owner Terry Gwaltney
10. Union Gospel Mission

Hope Fest Sponsors (\$500+)

1. AISIN
2. Herrin Second Baptist Church
3. Christian Life Church
4. Helia Healthcare
5. Herrin First Evangelical Presbyterian Church
6. Watermark Auto Group
7. Paul Jacobs, IL State Senate 59th District
8. WILCOGOP
9. Herrin-Energy Lions Club
10. Shawnee Express Inc.
11. Harvest Time Worship Center
12. Sergios Mexican Restaurant & Carmen's Café
13. Herrin Church of Christ
14. Community of Faith BBQ Heroes
15. COF HAPPY TRAILS MINISTRY
16. Caribbean Hut Food Truck
17. Scott Doody, IL State Representative 118th District

Hope Fest Friends (\$250+)

1. Patrick Windhorst- IL State Representative 117th District
2. South Side Lumber & Design Center- Kent Smith, Owner
3. Herrin First Church of God
4. Salvation Army- Marion
5. Joyner Therapy Service- Marion
6. Centerstone
7. Williamson County Republican Women
8. Diagraph
9. Dominos Pizza- Herrin
10. Newby's Pizza- Energy
11. Herrin Trophy & Awards- Rob Ahne
12. Regions Bank
13. Megabytes

14. Farmers Insurance- Bruce McCarthy
Insurance Murphysboro

15. Herrin Signs & The Zombie Guitar
Company- Tracy Estes

16. First Southern Bank

Looking Ahead: Get Involved and Save the Date The need does not stop when the festival ends. You can still support the Herrin House of Hope as we enter our 15th year. Please visit **HerrinHouseofHope.org** to join our *Sponsor a Day* program or come and serve individually or bring your church group, organization, or company to serve for a day.

SAVE THE DATE: Hope Fest will be back next year! Hope Fest 2027 is officially set for **Saturday, September 18 and Sunday, September 19, 2027**. We are moving the festival one week later, off the Murphysboro Applefest weekend, so even more people can come out, experience the fun, and support the mission of Southern Illinois' own Herrin House of Hope.

For more information, please visit www.hopefestevent.org.

Contact:

Rev. Dr. Troy D. Benitone, Hope Fest Event Director & President of the Board of Herrin House of Hope

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(Attached: Photos of check presentations from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois and Deaconess Illinois)

