

WHOLE HOG FESTIVAL

PAM WINDSOR

This year's John Maher Builders Whole Hog Festival in Spring Hill promises to be bigger and better than ever before! Mark your calendars for Saturday October 17th.

Held on the grounds of the historic Oaklawn Mansion, the family-friendly event offers something for everyone with live music, crafts, a kids' zone, and lots of pork-themed food and activities. And it's all for a good cause. Profits from the festival support The Well Outreach, which operates food pantries in Spring Hill and Mount Pleasant to help families in need.



Photos courtesy of The Well

The festival, which centers on all things pork-related, has added something new this year, making it more "whole hog" than ever. The new event is a Whole Hog Pitmasters Cookoff featuring a mix of nationally recognized and local pitmasters. And while pitmasters will be competing for top prizes, festivalgoers will come out winners, too. They'll be able to sample some of that award-winning barbecue.

"There will be a competition with the judges and then a second People's Choice Award," explains Shelly Sassen, Chief Ex-

ecutive Officer for The Well Outreach. And for the People's Choice, we'll be selling tastings. For \$12, people will be able to get tastings at 4 of the 10 pitmasters, along with baked beans, potato chips, a drink, and a roll. It will allow them to be part of that experience."

It's a nice addition to the long list of popular pork-related activities that continue to draw big crowds every year.

"People love the hog calling contest, Sassen says. "We have people enter from five years old up to 85 years old. Some of them with authentic hog calls, some of them with creative hog calling, and it's just wonderful to have the community show such support. Then, the bacon eating contest has grown in popularity over the past couple of years. We partner with Food Lion, which helps us provide free bacon for a year for the winner of that contest."

Local businesses also generously come together to provide lots of free activities for the kids' zone. And the regional craft fair is also a major attraction. One of the craft vendors this year will include Hope House, a newly opened Christian gift store on the Spring Hill campus of The Well Outreach. Profits from Hope House merchandise sales go toward supporting the food pantry.

Sassen says the Whole Hog Festival is The Well's biggest community fundraiser and also offers an opportunity to educate people about the growing numbers of struggling families in Maury County and ways they can contribute. Numbers show an ever-increasing need, with The Well serving just 2,400 families in 2019 to more than 28,000 families in 2026 this year.

"Every week, The Well, through the support of the community and 400 volunteers, does this work of serving our neighbors in need. We also partner with over 80 local churches to help us with our Jetpack program and our mobile food pantries."

The Whole Hog Festival is set for October 17th – 10 am to 5 pm. Admission is \$10, children 5 and under free. For more information on The Whole Hog Festival or The Well Outreach, visit: thewelloutreach.org.

