

HH Hope Empstead
County
Chamber of Commerce

Spa Seed Spitting

good time

47TH ANNUAL HOPE
WATERMELON FESTIVAL
AUG 10-12, 2023



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September 28

An advertisement for a musical performance. It features a yellow background with a large illustration of a banjo. In the top left, there is a red logo for "HEMPSTEAD HALL". In the top right, it says "AS SEEN ON GRAND OLE OPRY RYMAN AUDITORIUM IN NASHVILLE TENN". A QR code is located in the middle left. The ticket price "\$15-\$35" is in the middle right. The main text at the bottom reads "EAST NASH GRASS AND THE CLEVERLY'S" in large, bold letters, followed by "FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2023 - 7:00PM" in orange.

HEMPSTEAD HALL



\$15-\$35

**EAST NASH GRASS
AND THE CLEVERLY'S**

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2023 - 7:00PM

A WORD FROM THE ORGANIZER ON WHAT'S NEW AND IMPROVED AT THE 47TH WATERMELON FESTIVAL

We spoke with the Watermelon Festival's main organizer, Christy Burns, who is also the Hope-Hempstead County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, when there were a mere 16 days left to go before the festival opens. She described this time of year as "being pulled in more, different directions."

"I've got radio shows to do, TV interviews," Burns said.

"Christy's the famous one," Chamber Administrative Assistant and Membership Manager Angelica Manzaneres said. "She gets pulled around everywhere." Manzaneres has joined the chamber this year, continuing a career in customer service and her time now is devoted to helping with Watermelon Festival preparation.

Burns' plan is to have everything done by Friday August 4th. "Whatever we can get done by next Friday will make the next week easier for us. All we have Monday is the parade," Burns said, referring to the parade that gets things started downtown Monday August 7th at 6:00 p.m. Then the Seed-Spittin' Good Time that is this year's theme can start in earnest.

After helming her first festival last year, which was praised as a success on many grounds, from how many people were drawn to how much was raised for charitable causes, Burns credits her staff, the Chamber Board, the Chamber Ambassadors and countless volunteers for the help on a project that begins serious planning early in the year, at the same time as the Chamber's annual banquet is planned.

"You definitely think about it all year. You start planning towards the beginning of the year. But what's crazy is in May and June, it's like,

okay, I have a little bit of time. And then next thing you know, you're where I am today, and you have 16 days left," Burns said.

This year, Burns has come up with a festival plan that has a lot that is new and has upgraded a lot of the familiar. As of the time of our interview, vendors were still signing on but the number had reached 111, which Burns said is on a track to exceed last year.

So what this year is new or changed?

The Kidz Zone will be sponsored this year by River Valley Tractor, who, Burns said, will bring some equipment kids will enjoy. "We have inflatables again this year, but we have more than we did last year," Burns said. There will also be more games. It opens Thursday, August 10th at noon.

Nathaniel Holyfield and Maurice Henry have taken over the Watermelon By the Slice concession, a mainstay of the festival that will begin at 5:00 p.m. Thursday August 10th at the Big Tent on the Fair Park grounds.

Pony rides will be brought back again. As will camel rides. These will start at 9:00 a.m. Friday, August 11th at the Kidz Zone.

The Dog Show will return for the first time since 2021, sponsored by the City of Hope Animal Shelter and Hope for Paws. "We worked with them to get some certificates and ribbons for the different places in the different categories," Burns said. Thursday August 10th, with registration opening at 6:30 p.m. and the show starting at 7:00 p.m. on the Cricket Wireless Stage, where bleachers will be set up this year for those wanting to see the contest. Winners will be chosen in

five categories. Dog owners of all breeds are urged to enter their lop-eared or prop-eared friends as long as they are on leashes.

Musical acts Jacob Flores, the Georgia Thunderbolts and the Marshall Tucker Band will perform for the first time at the Watermelon Festival in Hope. Flores, who impressed at the first Klipsch Big Sound Downtown concert this summer, will appear on Friday August 11 on the Farmers Bank & Trust Stage, starting at 6:00 p.m. (free admission). On Saturday August 12th at the CMC Steel Products Stage at Legion Field. Gates will open at 6:00 p.m. for the headlining concert, The Watermelon Idol winner, followed by opening act The Georgia Thunderbolts and then the Marshall Tucker Band.

The brand-new 47th Annual Watermelon Festival t-shirt, featuring a Seed-Spittin'-Good Time-themed logo by Dillan Kelsey (who, full disclosure, also does graphic design for us here at SWARK.Today) will be available in all sizes in the Coliseum, which will open Thursday August 10th at noon.

The Watermelon Weigh-ins will occur this year at the Coliseum Festival Office Thursday, August 10th at 6:00pm and the auction will take place Saturday, August 12th at 11:30 am under the big tent.

When the festival is in full swing, and Burns is working from the Coliseum, she is engaged in responding to any problems that come up. But she still tries to make time to enjoy the festival herself. "Just trying to take it all in is the hard part," she said. "You try to take in all the hard work you've done for the last two months. You've got to find time to look around and say 'Wow.'"

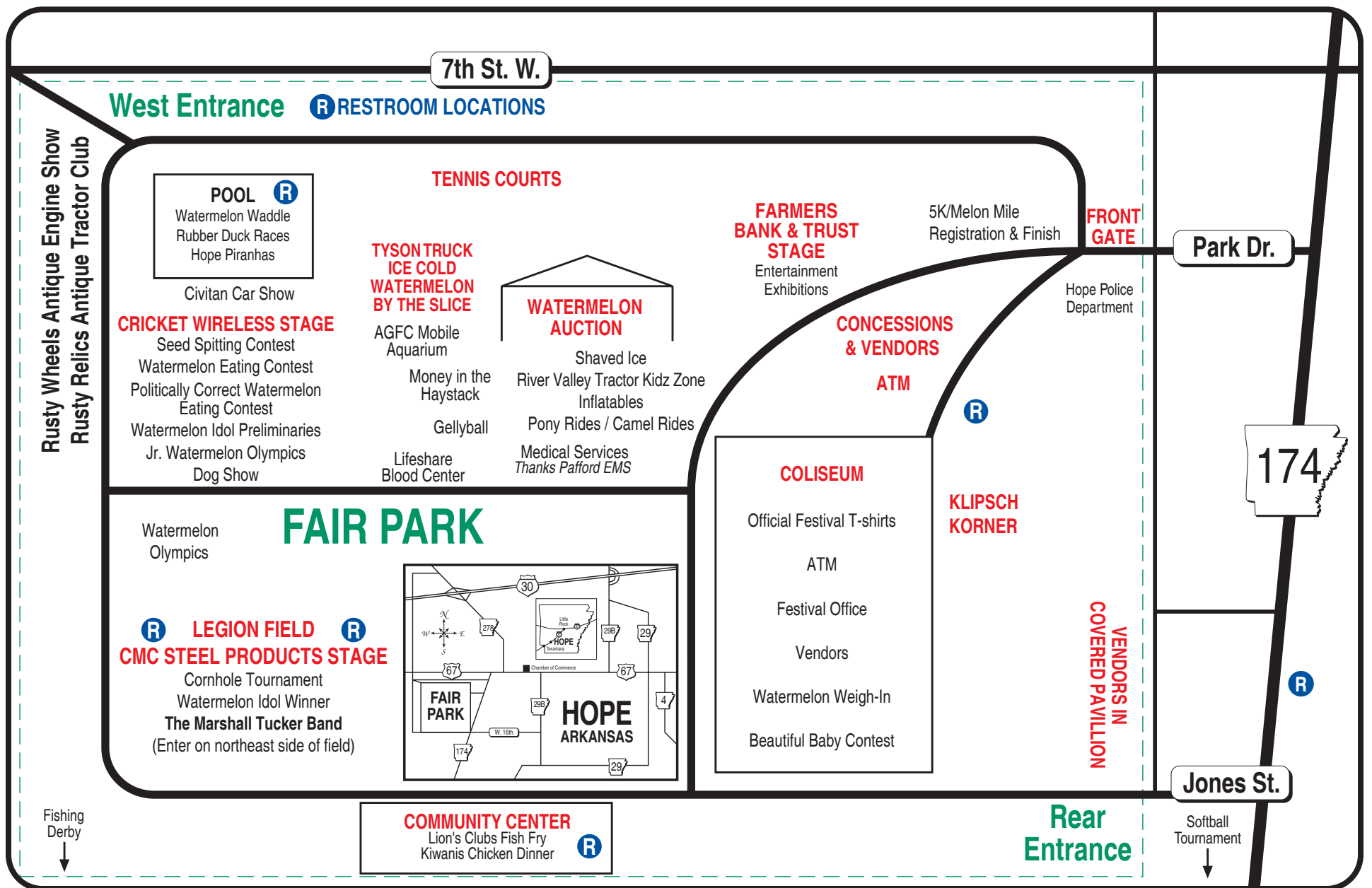


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46TH ANNUAL HOPE WATERMELON FESTIVAL MAP & PARK GUIDE





THURSDAY, AUGUST 10TH

Noon	FESTIVAL OPENS	Coliseum
	Watermelon Festival Ribbon Cutting	Outdoor
	Pageant Winner Introduction	Coliseum
	Vendors/Exhibitors	Horticulture Building
	Concessions Open	Covered Pavilion
	River Valley Tractor Kidz Zone Opens	
	- Inflatables, GellyBall, Games	
	Rusy Wheels Engine Show Opens	
	- Glen Scroggins (870)703-1374	
	Beautiful Baby Contest Display	Coliseum
1 pm - 6 pm	LifeShare Blood Drive	
4:30 pm - 7 pm	Kiwanis BBQ Chicken Supper	Community Center
5 pm	Watermelon by the Slice Opens	Big Tent
6 pm	Watermelon Contest Weigh-In	Coliseum
6 pm	Jr. Watermelon Olympics	in front of Cricket Wireless Stage
6 pm	Watermelon Olympics	meet at Legion Field
	- City of Hope Parks & Recreation	
6 pm-8 pm	Rafter J Living Proof Band	Farmers Bank & Trust Stage
7 pm	Dog Show	Cricket Wireless Stage
	- City of Hope Animal Shelter/Hope for Paws	

FRIDAY, AUGUST 11TH

9 am	FESTIVAL OPENS	Coliseum
	Vendors/Exhibitors	Outdoor
		Horticulture Building, Covered Pavilion
	River Valley Tractor Kidz Zone Opens	
9 am	- Inflatables, GellyBall, Games, Pony Rides, Camel Rides	
	Rusy Wheels Engine Show Opens	
9 am	- Glen Scroggins (870) 703-1374	
	Concessions	Outdoor
10 am	Watermelon by the Slice Opens	Big Tent
10 am	LifeShare Blood Drive	
Noon-6 pm	Carl Jackson	Farmers Bank & Trust Stage
3 pm	Lion's Club Fish Fry	Community Center
4:30 pm-7 pm	Watermelon Idol Preliminaries	Cricket Wireless Stage
5 pm	- Hosted by 2022 Watermelon Idol Winner, Arnetta Bradford	
	Washington Vintage Dancers	in front of coliseum
6 pm	Cornhole Tournament	Legion Field
6pm	- City of Hope Parks & Recreation	
	Jacob Flores Concert	Farmers Bank & Trust Stage
6 pm-8 pm	- Sponsored by Amigo Juan Mexican Restaurant	
	Watermelon Festival Softball Tournament Begins	Kelly Fields
	- City of Hope Parks & Recreation	


SATURDAY, AUGUST 12TH

7:30 am	Watermelon 5K	Front gate
8 am	Civitan Car Show	Behind Cricket Wireless Stage
8:30 am	Melon Mile	Front gate
	- Don Still (870) 397-1236	
9 am	Fishing Derby	Huckabee Lake
	- City of Hope Parks & Recreation	
9 am	FESTIVAL OPENS	Outdoor, Coliseum
	- Vendors/Exhibitors	Horticulture Building, Covered Pavilion
9 am	River Valley Tractor Kidz Zone Opens	
	- Inflatables, GellyBall, Games, Pony Rides, Camel Rides	
9 am	Rusy Wheels Engine Show Opens	
	- Glen Scroggins (870) 703-1374	
9 am	Rusty Relics Antique Tractor Club	
	- Roger White (870)451-2096	
9 am	Dancastics Dance Studio	Farmers Bank & Trust Stage
9:30 am	Money in the Haystack	River Valley Tractor Kidz Zone
	- Sponsored by Heather Doucet State Farm Insurance	
10 am	Concessions Open	Outdoor
10 am	Watermelon Waddle Duck Races	Hope Fair Park Swimming Pool
	- Special Thanks to Hope Piranhas Swim Team	
10 am	Watermelon by the Slice Opens	Big Tent
10 am	SW Arkansas Taekwondo Demo	Farmers Bank & Trust Stage
11 am	Hope Piranhas Swim Team Exhibition	Hope Fair Park Swimming Pool
11 am	Politically Correct Watermelon Eating Contest	Cricket Wireless Stage
	- Hosted by UAHT	
11:30 am	Watermelon Auction	Big Tent
	- Mark Ross, Chairman	
Noon	Watermelon Eating Contest	Cricket Wireless Stage
	- All ages	
Noon	Autism Sings	Farmers Bank & Trust Stage
Noon-6 pm	LifeShare Blood Drive	
1 pm	Autism Sings	Farmers Bank & Trust Stage
1:30 pm	Seed Spitting Competition	Cricket Wireless Stage
	- Dave Phillips, Chairman	
3:00 pm	Birds with Teeth Band	Farmers Bank & Trust Stage
5 pm	Nighthawk Band	Farmers Bank & Trust Stage
8:30 pm	The Marshall Tucker Band	Legion Field
	- Gates Open at 6:00pm	
	- The Georgia Thunderbolts 7:30pm	
	- Watermelon Idol Winner 8:20pm	

BEAT THE HEAT: WATERMELON STYLE

While participating in fun activities and attending 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 cool water to help replenish what your body is losing while you sweat and to also help your body temperature cool off and prevent overheating. Free water is available from Diamond Bank in front of the coliseum. 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. Diamond Bank will have a misting tent in front of the coliseum for those needing to cool off!
- 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!



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WATERMELON GELATO

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups pureed watermelon
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 1/2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 cup fat-free half & half
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/2 cup whipping cream

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place all ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth. Process according to your ice cream maker's instructions.

WATERMELON MARGARITA BITES

INGREDIENTS

- Watermelon
- Tequila of your choice
- Tajin or Salt

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut watermelon into cubes and place in a large bowl.
2. Soak the cubes in you choice of tequila for 3 hours.
3. Dip soaked watermelon cubes in your choice of tajin or salt and ENJOY!



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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 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 beginnings of the Festival can be traced back as far as 1916, when John S. Gibson, a pharmacist and owner of Gibson Drug Store 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. The competition caught the attention of Hope farmers Hugh and Edgar Laseter, who attempted to develop a watermelon seed line in an attempt to win the competition. Hugh was successful with this and on August 12, 1925, he grew a 136-pound watermelon, Arkansas's first giant watermelon. This generated a lot of excitement in the community and led to the first Watermelon Festival the following year.

In the early days of the festival, the Hope Chamber of Commerce would host a one day event, where citizens of Hope would serve watermelons to the train passengers that rode through and/or stopped in the city. The 1920s festival would also host a Watermelon Queen pageant, plus a large parade with decorated

cars, floats and bands to go along with the watermelon serving. 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 people 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, and 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. In 1935, the festival was briefly brought back when a farmer named Oscar D. Middlebrooks grew a 195-pound watermelon near Patmos. This record breaking melon was shipped around the country and ended up in the possession of many famous people, including the 30th President of the United States Calvin Coolidge 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, CM "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 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 ten-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 would not be broken until September 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.



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#WMFMEMORY

Hampton Inn & Suites favorite memory is the Tracy Byrd meet and greet and concert.



#WMFMEMORY

Farmers Bank favorite memories include the street dance, eating ice cold watermelon with family, money in the haystack, playing in baseball tournaments, taking tickets for the Lions Club and helping out the community.

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WATERMELON SEASON HURT BY EARLY RAINS BUT LATE CROP PROSPERS

The watermelon growing season in our area has been affected by a late frost and several bouts of heavy rain in July, rare occurrences to be sure. But growers say they have managed to make a slightly below or near average crop of quality melons despite the obstacles the local weather has posed.

The showers of July have presented the greatest difficulty for the watermelon growers we have talked to. As Shannon Salinas, of Salinas Farms on Hempstead County Road 55 near the border of Hempstead and Nevada Counties explained, "The way watermelons work when you have saved in the ground, you want it to be wet. When you've got vines growing, you still want water that wants to start sending fruit. You don't want any more water. Yeah, we had a very wet July. Absolutely. So that had an impact." She also said a late frost in April was damaging to early growth of the vines.

Salinas said that while the hope had been to provide melons for the Watermelon Festival, that would not occur because their early crop had already been produced and sold, while their second planting, in May, did not produce because of the July rains. Elsewhere in their garden, they are growing corn, squash and peppers.

Lee Koehn, growing melons on 30 acres near Bradley, had a similar experience with the crop he planted in early spring but was able to plant again later for better results: "Just the cooler, wetter spring slowed my plants down enough to where my first crop wasn't real good. My late crop, we're now hoping to send a few of those into Hope. And this year, they're looking real good. It's an average or above average crop."

For Chad Bingham, the temptation of his watermelons for the deer near his farm south of the University of Arkansas Hope-Texarkana campus on Highway 29 proved too great. "I don't know what the deal was," he said. "But they went right through the fence. They kept me

down pretty good. I may have a few late [melons], very late probably after the festival, but it won't be too many."

Jesse Bradley, who has grown melons and other crops east of Bodcaw for the past ten years, said his crop was delayed because of the wet weather, but that planting a month later yielded a crop that will not equal last year's: "I am going to have some melons for the Watermelon Festival, but I don't know just how many. And I think it's not going to be as big of melons as I had last year." Bailey's grandson helped grow the melon that weighed in as the heaviest at last year's weigh-in and was bought by Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders at the auction that ensued.

The next couple of weeks Bailey said would be pivotal to the taste of the melons he will be harvesting. "We're not predicted to have any rain for the next week," he said. "And the melons are starting to turn sweet now. In another week, we should have some really good quality melons."

Richard Bradley, growing his melons in the Cale area of Nevada County, said his crop, too, has been affected by the untimely rains, but also by the effect of the rains on pollinating insects, who are essential to the production of melons and almost everything else. "We're seeing very little bee activity in the fields--bees, wasps, yellowjackets. We've talked to some of the Cave City people and [they're] basically saying the same thing." Still, Bradley said while the quantity of melons would be down, the melons will still taste terrific.

This has been the case with most of the growers we spoke to. They say that despite the reverses of the early season, the melons they've picked have tasted good. As for their hopes of providing melons for the Watermelon Festival's By-the-Slice tent, some growers are sure they can, while others have had their crop delayed.

#WMFMEMORY



Judy Flowers' Favorite memory is when Bill Clinton visited when he was running for Governor of Arkansas and the Watermelon Idol concert.

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#WMFMEMORY

Christy Burns, Kenzi Burns, and Angelica Manzanara's favorite memories are hanging out with friends in front of the Coliseum, the watermelon pageants, riding camels and the watermelon parade.



#WMFMEMORY

Colby Powell's favorite memory is the Mist Tents at the Watermelon Festival. Kids could get a stamp and they could go in and cool off all day long.



Trey Wright, Agent
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WATERMELON WAR: SALT VS. NO SALT

SALT: THE ONLY WAY TO EAT WATERMELON - BY APRIL LOVETTE

Salt. All the way. That is the only true way to eat this sweet delectable fruit that reminds us of summer days and fun family times!

In my grandparents' home, where fresh fruit and vegetables from the garden were a staple, watermelon was one of the faves. My cousins and I looked forward to that part of the summer when the watermelons were ready to come out of the garden and straight to the table. And they really went straight to the table! My granny, the consummate cook and sage in all things culinary, knew just how we liked it. She didn't cut it up into little slices and pieces, no way! We were too serious about our watermelon for all that. One cut straight down the middle of that ripe, red and green sweet treat and then an entire half of the watermelon was placed on the table that she had lined with old newspapers and then the spoons were

doled out. We're talking about the big spoons, too! And what took pride of place right there in the middle of the table? The salt shaker.

You might be thinking how could several kids eat on one watermelon at the same time? Oh we could! Not only did my papaw grow some good-sized watermelons, we had our system down and it worked like a well-oiled machine. (Or should I say well-juiced?) Whoever got the lucky straw that day and was honored with the first scoop would survey the heart of that succulent melon and decide on just the right spot. The sweet spot. Then he or she would sprinkle a little salt, and with a skilled precision after years of practice, circle-scoop out a big chunk of that juicy fruit. Then the salt-shaker would pass on to the next eager kiddo in line while the first began to chew with a genuine expression of pure joy as the flavors of sweet and salty played a well-rehearsed symphony on the palate.

You might also be thinking, what about that poor kid who's last in line? Isn't she impatient at having to wait her turn? Or is he growing more and more anxious with each turn, a kind of melon madness slowly forming, in fear that

no sweet spots will be left? Nah. Papaw's watermelons were just that good. All the way down to the rind, every bite was as sweet as the last. And then of course, you add the salt, making it an exquisite experience of taste. Each of us knew that no matter where we were in the line that day, we would still get as good a treat as the others.

And so the routine went. Salt, scoop, and pass. Salt, scoop, and pass. All the while, we were eating, laughing, and talking. Sometimes, we paused long enough to remove a few seeds from our scoop and toss them down on the newspaper. Was it messy? Of course! But that was the genius of my granny, because when we were finished and the only thing left was a big piece of watermelon rind and a mountain of seeds, she just scooped it up, newspaper and all, over into the trash can and sent us back out to play.

And the salt? That shaker stayed right there. Those of you who favor symmetry and wonder about details have probably been grinding your teeth the last few paragraphs with wondering what happened to the other half of that watermelon though?!! Oh, that's easy! It was covered with Saran Wrap and put in the fridge so we could do it all again that night. Because that first half was just our sweet snack between lunch and dinner! And the salt, an absolute must when eating watermelon, would be ready and waiting.

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NO SALT: I'M AGAINST SALTING WHATS ALREADY PERFECT

BY JEFF SMITHPETERS

I am always disappointed to learn someone can't go without salting their watermelon. For me it points to dissatisfaction and lack of gratitude for hundreds of billions of years of what a developing universe, galaxy, solar system, planet, human palate and plant species has perfected. Who are they to tell all those lit pin-points and swirls we see on the latest James Webb telescope images that they needed to add a teaspoon more salt?

That first bite of a slice of the good life just cut from the vine is a billowing, quenching burst of notes of banana and cherry and dark grape such that you wonder why you bother with any lesser fruits while this one exists. But alas we must wait until middle summer to remind ourselves again the vine beats the tree in this case so soundly you pity the other contestants.

At my dad's parents' house up in Okolona, it had been a ritual during the summertime to gather the half a dozen

or so melons that had been raised on the property's tilled fields or bought from nearby growers under a great oak tree that stood wide-canopied over a circular plot of thinner grass. The growing dozen or so of us of Bill Smithpeters' sons, daughters, spouses and grandkids would come in on a late Sunday morning, eat a lunch of chicken or beef or deer with fresh peas and cut-up tomatoes grandma had prepared and about two hours later start splitting the melons under the tree with long knives.

In the summers of the 70s and early 80s it was hardly ever as hot outside as it is now, (except for several torrid weeks in 80 and 87), so we grandkids would eat fresh, unrefrigerated eighths and quarters of mostly red, a few orange watermelons while sitting on a weathered wooden sled that would be used by tractors to pull bags of harvested crops or feed along the ground from station to station of the farm. What we talked about, I

can't remember but peace was made among us town and country cousins who would have been hard at some front yard football a few seconds before the unmistakable fwap of knives into melonflesh by delegated uncles summoned us to the tree's shade. Aunts brought plates. Some of them brought saltshakers.

Some would tell me they could not eat watermelon without it. Yes, I'd even try it myself once or twice--never on an entire slice--but for me the salt was a blight on a taste that should be left to its own, just like the rituals leading to our feast and the affectionate japes we traded during. I could even understand adding sugar to a less-than-sweet specimen, as we do with strawberries, but adding a gritty, parching substance that conjures the very opposite taste to watermelon's flooding of mellow and sweet struck me from a young age as the dessert equivalent of vandalism. I usually tried not to say so. But here I have.



#WMFMEMORY

Diamond Bank's favorite memories are eating watermelon, all the fun and games for the kids and running the 5K when Kyla Hamilton's son won the race.

JACOB FLORES TO BRING SYNTHESIS OF GENRES TO FRIDAY NIGHT PERFORMANCE

This year's Friday-night entertainment at the Watermelon Festival is sure to captivate the crowds since it will feature the musical stylings of Jacob Flores. Some may remember Flores from back when he played at Amigo Juan periodically around 2014, and others might have caught his show June 1st at Big Sounds Downtown where he wowed the audience. Anyone who has ever had the opportunity to watch a Flores performance can attest that he delivers an unforgettable show that combines multiple musical genres, appealing to audience members of all backgrounds and ages. Flores brings to the table some of his own original songs in addition to classic cover songs delivered with a twist.

"I think many musicians limit themselves by saying they are only a country singer or rock singer," Flores says. "I always like to ask 'what if' when I'm working on a song and I try to be innovative." This type of visionary creativity results in the audience hearing a classic song that has been around for 30 years or more, yet it sounds brand new. Flores blends genres and revitalizes the traditional so seamlessly that the listener feels as if he or she has just discovered something different and unique.

One such variation he adds to his music is a bit of mariachi music, an influence derived from watching his family's mariachi band while growing up. His grandfather started the family band and Flores spent his childhood watching his dad and cousins perform in restaurants and other venues. "I was exposed to music and

performance at a young age," Flores says. "That is what developed my love and passion for music, and it's cool that I get to keep that tradition going."

Flores takes that tradition of performing though and infuses his own style into it. "I try to think about what made a song popular, add my own interpretation to it, and then see what happens," he says. "Also, playing on an acoustic guitar like a steel string kind of has that Spanish sound to it, which comes from my background, and it is a unique way to play an English song. I love merging those two cultures together and making music that most people wouldn't think would work." Include with that his striking voice and an undeniable mastery of the guitar, and the audience will leave this show with more than just a trip to a concert; it's an experience.

Flores says he is excited to come back to Hope and perform again and he hopes festival guests will be pleased with the show. "Just the drive down to Hope gets me thinking of all those times playing at Juan's and reminds me of where I started," he says. "My music has changed over the years, and I'm excited to be able to come back and play for those same fans or customers at the restaurant and be progressive and show how I've changed and improved."

Amigo Juan is sponsoring this free concert for the festival-goers and proprietor Juan Rivera says he is looking forward to seeing how the community responds to the show. "Jacob has good, soft music and he will be bringing something new to the festival," Rivera says. "His music

targets audience members of all different ages, and he can entertain many people with his variety of music."

Flores says concert-goers can look forward to high energy, passion, and creativity on Friday night, and he hopes most of all that guests walk away feeling like they just saw something unique. "I don't think I fit into just one category of music," Flores says. "I like to surprise people."

Watch Jacob Flores live in concert Friday night, August 11th, from 6-8pm at the Farmers Bank & Trust Stage during the 47th Annual Hope Watermelon Festival.



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YOUNG GEORGIA THUNDERBOLTS TO MAKE GORGEOUS CLATTER AS SATURDAY CONCERT MIDDLE ACT

The Georgia Thunderbolts have the sound of an irresistible spike from the sky and it's fitting that they come from Rome, Georgia, which their website describes as being in the "foothills of the Appalachians," because their songs often build from hard ripples of guitar riffs to the peak majesties of Southern rock power.

They're a young band, with the ages of its five members averaging 25 and energy levels to match their decibels. Every member contributes inventive parts to songs about the bluesman's journey through a world where demons do roam but where connection to friends, lovers and community still seems possible in songs like "Lend a Hand," "Lookin' For an Old Friend," "Alright Now" and "So You Wanna Change the World."

Asked by SWARK.Today whether "So You Wanna Change the World," with its invitation to the listener to go ahead and try, was initially written as an answer song to The Beatles' "Revolution," lead singer and lyricist T.J. Kyle said answering the Fab Four was not the original intent, but the song evolved into that. "I guess it just kind of took the shape of its own that way, really," he said. "Instead of talking about doing something, that song is giving you the opportunity. Everybody has that opportunity. It's about going out and seeing what you can

find. Obviously, sometimes you're going to lose, but more often than not you'll find something that makes your clock tick."

Certainly, The Georgia Thunderbolts have done their share of making clocks tick, both in the recording studio and on the road. Kyle says the approach to playing its tour dates is different from recording. "[On stage,] it's all about giving the audience what they need ... It's trying to bring the good out in people when you're there. And you just try to make them smile somehow and keep on smiling," he said.

Kyle said audiences can expect a bit more elaboration on their songs than on the recordings The Georgia Thunderbolts (2020) and Can We Get a Witness (2022). They also have a song that calls for audiences to contribute: "We have sing-along off the record [Can We Get a Witness] that we do. It's kind of nice for the crowd to get involved in."

"Gonna Shine" is a single the band is releasing in September and Watermelon Festival concert goers will likely hear it played. Kyle described how the song developed. "[Guitarist] Logan [Tolbert] sent me something he was working on. And he just had the first two little lines and I thought, well, we need to finish this. So I wrote it out the next night, to finish the song. And then I got with Logan the next day, played it together. So we put it together. We all got in the room and got the band together. We all threw it together. It's a really magical song."

Logan Tolbert and Riley Couzzart both form the band's prominent twin-guitar attack, with Couzzart playing the

most solos with a napalm fire as Tolbert riffs and exchanges phrases with Couzzart. Zach Everett, who Kyle calls a great all-around musician, adds a loping, inventive bass line that the songs often allow him to take solo breaks on. Bristol Perry is adept at speedy rolls you don't expect in fills that defy rock-blues cliché. Finally, T.J. Kyle brings to their sound a voice that can inhabit moments of forlorn quiet and also grandiose strutting and arcing as the lyrics and rapid climbing of the music needs.

SWARK.Today asked Kyle just how a voice like that develops. "I'm still trying to figure that out. I grew up always around music. My parents always listened to old soul and gospel music. And I just kind of mimic those old cats," he said.

Finally, we asked the ultimate questions any musician playing the Hope Watermelon Festival should have ready answers to. Do they like watermelon, and do they prefer it with or without salt?

Kyle said, "We do. For sure. No salt for me. I think I'd just eat it straight out of the garden."

As part of the 47th Watermelon Festival's headlining concert, The Georgia Thunderbolts will take the CMC Stage at Legion Field Saturday August 12th at 7:30 p.m.

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MARSHALL TUCKER BAND TO BRING HEARTFELT SOUTHERN ROCK TO SATURDAY CONCERT

The headlining act that will finish the 47th Annual Watermelon Festival is the Marshall Tucker Band, which will take the CMC Stage in Legion Field Saturday August 12 at 8:30 p.m.

The band started in 1972, most of its members from Spartanburg, South Carolina and gets its name from that of a blind piano tuner whose name was found on a key to a warehouse in which the band was rehearsing.

In 1973, the ambitious Southern rock band began to establish its recording career with a self-titled album that showcased Doug Gray's warmly accented lead vocal and Toy Caldwell's angular guitar virtuosics and open-hearted songwriting. About their stage show, late country fiddler Charlie Daniels would be quoted in the band's 2005 Anthology box set liner notes as saying they "came onstage and just blew it out from start to finish." He'd often guest with Marshall Tucker on recordings and at tour stops.

Over the 51 years of the band's existence, it has put out 22 studio albums, 11 live albums and 19 singles. In that time the band has undergone many changes in personnel, starting with bassist Tommy Caldwell, brother to Toy, perishing in a 1980 car accident and Toy and the other original members leaving the band by 1983, leaving Gray and windplayer Jerry Eubanks.

Today, singer Doug Gray is the only original band member still in the lineup, but as heard on its 2017 live release Hall

of Fame Concert, Gray brings big range, rhythmic delivery and feeling phrasing while the guitarists Chris Hicks and Rick Willis exchange expressive, punchy solos over the shifty tricks of drummer B.B. Borden and bassist Ryan Ware. Multi-instrumentalist Marcus James Henderson adds searching flute solos that summon a night-time mist around the songs and plays keyboards and sax, too. Don't be surprised if the jams go past the ten-minute range but keep you hooked the whole time.

Be ready for old favorites like "Heard It in a Love Song," "Can't You See," and "Fire on the Mountain," but I'll be most pleased if they play "This Ol' Cowboy," which describes a way of life I'm too soft for, but which lets all the band's soloists take turns through a set of changes that light up the night with the feeling of freedom and new vistas.

"Long Hard Ride" has a brisk shuffle and a walking bass that has been the setting for decades of showing off from Marshall Tucker players (and Charlie Daniel) that make it clear that ride wasn't all pain and some rollicking was had despite the name.


"Desert Skies" is another I hope to hear, a song with some Willie Nelson influence on Doug Gray's delivery and on the lyrics by Toy Caldwell, which conjure an image of a lone Cowboy content to while away his life's journey alone and unmissed as long he gets those nights to camp in the desert dark. Gray and the saxophone trade resolute statements.

Willie Nelson is far from the only influence on this eclectic

band that has proudly worn the moniker of the first progressive southern rock band. Toy Caldwell's playing style often reminds me of that of Jerry Garcia. The lyrics often describe the mind-wanderings of rambling men out away from civilization at the point of realizing it's the journey not the destination that most matters. The landscapes evoked aren't far from those The Band brought us to. Every song layers in novel additions from the band's players that range from folk blues to country-rock to psychedelia to jazz fusion.

On a coincidental note: Hope's is not the only Watermelon Festival the Marshall Tucker Band will play in. They have an engagement on August 26 at another watermelon festival in Winterville, North Carolina.





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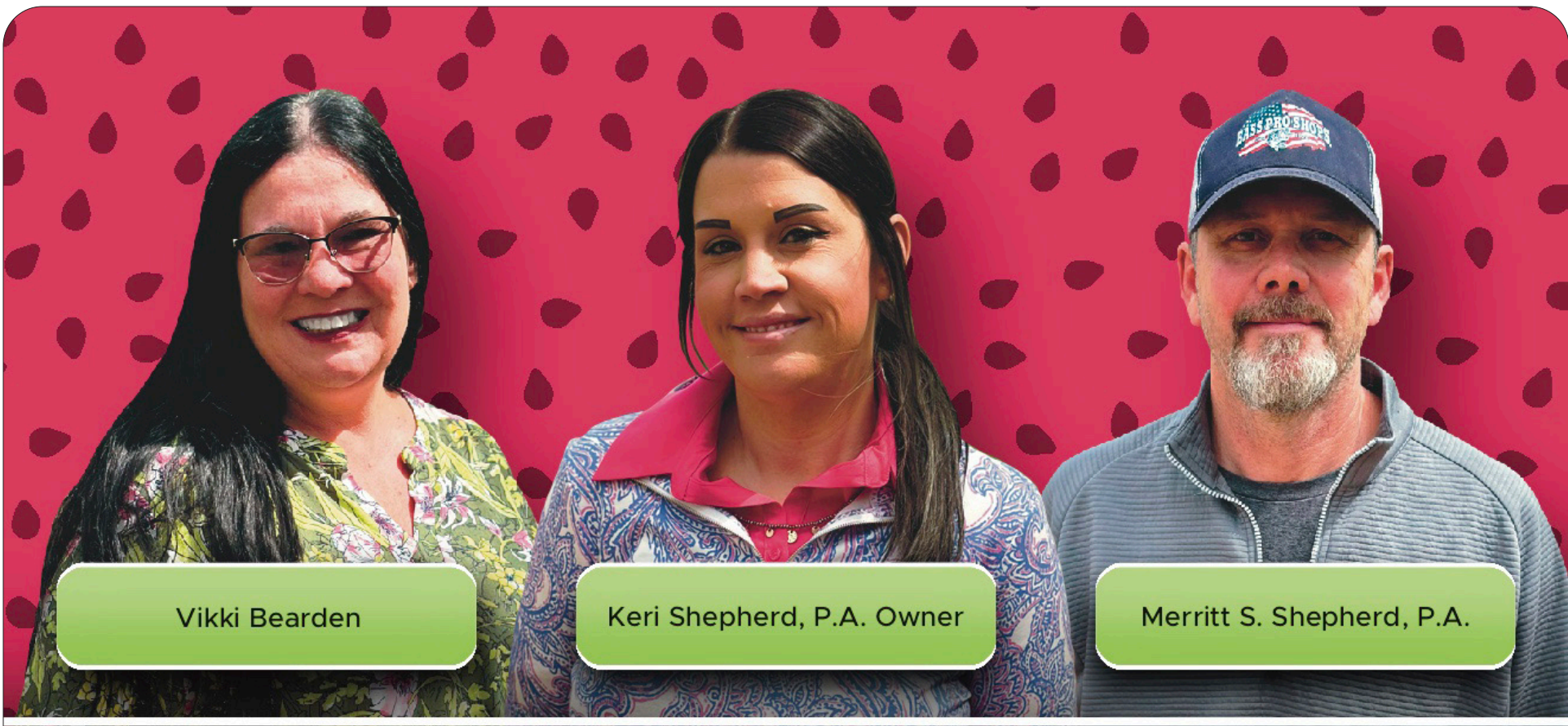
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