

Belonging Begins With Us to celebrate unity in Hutchinson

Music, games, food and a flag ceremony representing the native lands of Hutchinson residents will highlight the second Belonging Begins With Us celebration at Masonic/West River Park on Sunday, Sept. 15.

The event, scheduled from 1 to 3 p.m., aims to bring neighbors across the city together to learn more about one another and foster a sense of welcome and acceptance.

“This event is a celebration of the diversity of those who call Hutchinson home while sending a clear signal that ours is a community where all are welcomed to work, study, raise a family, and thrive,” said Oliver Ferguson of Ridgewater College, one of more than a dozen community organizations hosting the event.

Hutchinson’s first Belonging Begins With Us event in 2021 attracted more than 150 participants. This year’s celebration promises even more activities and opportunities for connection:

- opening ceremony and flag presentation,
- musical performance by the Drum Circle from Universal Music Center,
- Mayor Gary Forcier's address and proclamation reading,
- family activities (rock painting, fabric painting, poster activities), and
- food vendors available throughout the event.

The flag display will feature students from Maplewood Academy — many of whom hail from other states and nations — presenting the flags of their native lands.

Mayor Gary Forcier’s remarks will center around a City Council-approved proclamation, declaring, “Hutchinson is stronger and greater when we work together toward those core American values that afford everyone the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

The proclamation emphasizes that Hutchinson has always valued fresh perspectives and ideas from people of diverse backgrounds, committing to a welcoming environment where all residents have opportunities to grow and succeed.

Organizers stress that the event is based on the belief that everyone deserves a sense of belonging in their community, regardless of their background. It’s designed to show newcomers and longtime residents alike that they are an important part of what makes

Hutchinson special.

Planning for the 2024 celebration has been underway for several months, and similar festivities are taking place in Glencoe and other southwest Minnesota communities as part of the national Welcoming Week campaign. This annual event, featuring thousands of celebrations nationwide since 2012, aims to bring together neighbors and build inclusive communities.

The Hutchinson planning committee includes members from schools, churches, businesses and nonprofits. Collaborators include Ridgewater College, United Way of McLeod County, Southwest Initiative Foundation, Maplewood Academy, Hutchinson Health and Hutchinson Center for the Arts.

Kerry Ward of McLeod County Health and Human Services highlighted the significance of the event, stating, "This celebration helps us build trust and engagement with residents, allowing them to have a voice in the care and services they receive from us."

For more information about the Belonging Begins With Us celebration, contact Than Than Kyaw at 320-552-0158 or Kerry Ward at 320-864-3185.

Sidebar:

Additional events highlighting the importance of belonging:

- **Thursday, Sept. 12 at 11 a.m.:**

- "Confirmation Bias: Understand Your Brain, Change Your Life"**

- Motivational speaker Amy Dee will deliver a high-energy and humorous talk at Ridgewater College, 2 Century Ave. S.E. The event is sponsored by Ridgewater and Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health Services. Admission is free, but attendees are encouraged to RSVP by emailing Kerry Ward at kerry.ward@mcleodcountymn.gov.

- **Tuesday, Sept. 17 from 1 to 7 p.m.:**

- Diversity Day: Poster Open House Walk-Through**

- Taking place at Art's Place, 35 First Ave. S.W., this open house will offer resources and knowledge about various disabilities. Advocates will be on hand to answer questions, and snacks will be served. The event is sponsored by Parents Inspired, Proof Alliance and the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities.