8th Annual Hodges University Diversity Festival

To fulfill its community outreach initiative, the Hodges University Diversity Committee, seven years ago, started the annual Hodges University Diversity Festival. We collaborated with different organizations, including the Collier County Parks and Recreation who donated the venue for the first festival, Costco, Media Vista Group, Lee Pitts Live, the Mental Health Association of SWFL, NAACP, the Hispanic Chamber, The African Network of Southwest Florida, Walmart, and Publix, just to name a few, to create this wonderful event.

Now in its eighth year, the Hodges Diversity Festival once again brings together various cultures and ethnic groups located across Southwest Florida. The festival, taking place on Saturday, October 3, is a one-day event designed for the whole family. While moving to a new venue, the Hodges University campus on Northbrooke Drive in Naples, this celebration will continue to gather musicians, artists, poets and dancers from a variety of ethnicities. The Diversity Festival promotes understanding and goodwill for our diverse mix of cultures throughout our communities.

In addition to a different venue, this year’s festival will celebrate new additions as well. In honor of its outstanding community work, Harry Chapin Food Bank will be recognized for its positive local support. October has been designated as a special food bank month, so all festival attendees are encouraged to bring two non-perishable food items to fill the food bank truck that will be on hand.

Home Depot will be one of our sponsors of the “Children Venue,” providing carpentry workshops for the children to participate in.

The festival committee is also recognizing some of our local high school STEM students. STEM students from Lely High School in Collier County were challenged to design the logo for this year’s festival. All of the students in the program were invited to participate. Twenty-three logos were submitted to the committee, and Briana Zacarias’ design was selected from the group as the first place winner. All 23 logos will be on display at the festival, and the students will be on-hand, as STEM Ambassadors, sharing their perspectives about diversity.

The festival will begin at noon with the Parade of Nations. Community members, students and staff from Hodges dress in ethnic costumes representing various countries spanning several continents. Places that have been represented year after year are multiple countries in Africa; Albania, Greece, and Czech Republic (Europe); Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela (South America); Japan, Korea (Asia); and the USA (North America). Some historical background is provided along with a description of the garment, including its cultural and historical significance.

Throughout the day, diversity will be celebrated through art, music, dance, and song. Families are encouraged to come together, as there will be something for everyone. Children will have a special area with arts/crafts; bounce houses, and other fun provided by Collier County Sheriff’s Office and Home Depot. During the festival, three corporations and three individuals who are outstanding examples of embracing diversity and inclusion in our community will be honored with the Hodges University Corporate Excellence in Diversity award and the Dr. Harold Russell Excellence in Diversity award.
Local artists will also be on-hand, displaying their talents and work. Vendors from non-profit organizations will be disseminating valuable and educational public service information from the stage and from their booths. Restaurants and food vendors will provide a vast variety of delicious multi-cultural food to sample and enjoy.

The main purpose of the festival is to build bridges to the larger community and to work with groups to bring a wider and more highlighted focus to the experience of diversity and inclusion.

Every effort has been made to provide activities at the festival that promotes greater understanding of our differences while encouraging conversations that help us learn about our commonalities.

The activities of the day go beyond the visible or tangible aspects of culture and ethnicity, such as attire or cuisine, to celebrating how these intangible things add to the uniqueness of citizens and will add strength to our Southwest Florida communities through the power of understanding, empathy and inclusion.

Diversity is the one true thing we all have in common, and we celebrate it every day. The festival is an excellent way we at Hodges can create a space for members of the public to celebrate diversity with us. Hodges University is committed to tolerance, sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect everywhere within our community, and we hereby affirm our promise to provide a welcoming place for one and all at our festival.

You can help us by being involved on various levels:

- Sponsorship opportunities- **Premier** $5,000, **Presenting** $2,500 and **Venue** $1,000
- Vendor (selling and non-selling)-$150 and $75
- Art Gallery Participant
- Entertainment Participant
- Parade of Nations Participant
- Volunteer opportunities
- Canned food donations for the Harry Chapin Food Bank

Together, we will make the 8th Annual Hodges University Diversity Festival another great success. Invite your families and friends for the fun of sharing our diversity in a welcoming, educational and inclusive environment.

Cost of Admission:

- **Children** age 5 and under free; **Group** of five- $30.00; **Single** -$10.00

To be a sponsor, vendor, or participant and to purchase tickets in advance visit: [https://www.hodges.edu/about/divfest.aspx](https://www.hodges.edu/about/divfest.aspx)

**For any questions, contact:** Gail B. Williams, Chief Diversity Officer, and Diversity Festival Chairperson

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