

Polk County Family Week Celebrates Five Years

The fifth annual Polk County Family Week is encouraging all families in Polk County to mark their calendars for November 12-18, 2011. A week full of fun activities and events are designed to unite, honor, and celebrate families. Details for all contests and events can be found on the website [www.polkcountyfamilyweek.com].

The theme for 2011 Polk County Family Week is *Family Reunion*. "We want to recognize the different cultures in our community and celebrate our own heritages," according to Lori Waters, founding chair of Polk County Family Week and Director of Public Affairs for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "It is our hope Polk County will unite and see ourselves as a large, extended family that supports and appreciates each other."

The Polk County Family Week proclamation declares that "private citizens, corporations, non-profit agencies, government entities, and faith based groups, schools and families themselves have an important role to play in building successful families." Teri Saunders, CEO of Heartland for Children affirms this. "As we celebrate Polk County Family Week, Heartland for Children acknowledges families are the foundation for healthy communities. We also recognize the importance of supporting parents in their role as they nurture, value and develop our community's children."

A kick-off event will be held at Central Park in Winter Haven on Saturday, November 12, 2011 from 9:00 am until 1:00 pm. The day will begin with a cultural parade at 9:00 am. Cultural entertainment will be offered at various times throughout the day. Bounce houses, fun booths, and informative booths to create awareness of resources available to families in Polk County will be available. Families can get a free family photo and free food and snacks. There will be a variety of fun, free activities for the entire family.

The kick-off will begin with a free pet-friendly 5K or 1 Mile Run/Walk at 8:00 am. There is no fee for the run, but registration is required. Visit www.polkcountyfamilyweek.com for registration information.

All middle and elementary Polk County students are invited to enter art and essay contests with the theme of "Why I Love My Family". "Polk County Family Week promotes the kind of family spirit that will motivate our students to become effective parents, engaged citizens and qualified employees of the future workforce," according to Margaret Anne Wheeler, Polk County Schools Community Involvement Senior Coordinator. Public school students may enter the contests through their schools. Home and private schooled students may submit their entries to Explorations V Children's Museum located at 109 North Kentucky Avenue in Lakeland. Winners will be awarded first, second, and third place cash prizes in the grade categories of K-2, 3-5, and 6-8.

A Grandparent of the Year contest is held to recognize the importance and wisdom of grandparents in our community. Nominations are currently being accepted. Winners will be awarded and recognized at the kick-off.

Bears for Joyce, a teddy bear drive, will continue this year. "My mother Joyce passed away last year after a long battle with cancer," explains Waters. "This drive began as a way for me to honor her memory but has become a way to share love and comfort with our community by participating. We too can feel love and comfort in our lives as we give bears to hug."

Talent Shows will be held in Winter Haven and Lakeland at 6:00 pm on Sunday, November 13, 2011. Choose the location convenient to you. Applications are currently being accepted for family friendly acts of 3-5 minutes. No prizes will be awarded--everyone is a winner. More details and applications are available on the website [www.polkcountyfamilyweek.com].

Monday is Celebrate the Past day. Tuesday is Celebrate the Present day. Wednesday is Celebrate the Future and Eat with Your Family Day. "It's important to know where we've come from, to evaluate where we are, and to plan for our future," Waters explains.

Thursday is "Be the Best Neighbor Day". "This is my favorite part of Family Week each year! I have a vision of seeing everyone in our county thinking about being kind and doing service for each other that day. Maybe making cookies for their neighbor, letting someone go in front of them at the grocery check-out, even just to

smile," explains Waters. Get free admission with the donation of a new or gently loved book to Bok Tower Gardens from 8:00 am - 5:00 pm at 1151 Tower Boulevard in Lake Wales and to Explorations V Children's Museum from 9:00 am - 5:30 pm at 109 North Kentucky Avenue in Lakeland. There are hundreds of service ideas on our website of ways we can be the best neighbor. Participants are invited to share the kind act that they do on this day on the Facebook page of Polk County Family Week to be entered in a drawing for a prize. "It is fun to serve, and as we serve together that day, great things can happen," continues Waters.

Last but not least is Family Fun Day on Friday. A free Movie in the Park is available in Haines City. The YMCA's will be open to all Polk families. The Arts Ensemble located at 1000 American Superior Boulevard in Winter Haven is offering free painting also for Polk families. Libraries throughout the county are hosting fun, free activities for families. "This is a day to just have fun and relax with your family. "Wholesome recreation is an essential part of a successful family," said Waters.

Updates are continually being added to the website [www.polkcountyfamilyweek.com]. So keep checking it out and plan for November 12-18 to celebrate and honor families by participating with us in all of the great offerings and events.

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