

For Immediate Release
June 21, 2010

Contact: Michelle Tokan
Michigan Challenge Director
517.546.3920

Michigan Challenge Balloonfest: An established special event built on family tradition that continues to entertain a new generation

The Howell area can expect a high level of activity as guests plan to attend the 26th annual balloonfest at the Howell High School complex, 1200 W. Grand River, and in downtown Howell.

The celebration is June 25-27 and is centered around nearly 50 beautiful balloons that decorate the sky during the event that has attracted more than 120,000 guests annually.

The festival starts on Friday night with an early evening balloon launch followed by the MediLodge Fireworks. Also on Friday, the Detroit Pistons will bring in a mobile unit where fans can shoot hoops, win prizes and take their photo with a Pistons championship trophy.

Mass balloon launches take place, weather permitting, on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings, between 6 and 8 p.m. Early birds can arrive just after dawn on Saturday and Sunday to watch the pilots compete for the title of Michigan Challenge champion as they fly in to the site after launching their craft from locations in the countryside.

The Michigan Challenge is hosted by the Howell Area Chamber of Commerce. PNC Bank is the major sponsor. Supporting sponsors are Citizens Insurance, Tanger Outlet Center and Waste Management. Beverage sponsor is Pepsi. Site host is Howell Public Schools.

Moving into the next 25 years

After celebrating its 25th anniversary last year, Michigan Challenge XXVI continues to move into the next quarter-of-a-century, and maintains its tradition as one of the best outdoor festivals in the area.

The weekend event features the state championship of hot-air ballooning, as well as family entertainment and activities. New for 2010 is PNC Pistons Parties, antique appraisals, a national mobile tour, a basketball tournament in downtown Howell and the Landing Zone, a creative and entertaining area for kids of all ages to play, shop, eat and explore art.

In the Landing Zone, kids have a chance to "Assemble Some Fun" in the first Balloonfest 500.

"Kids will create wearable cardboard box cars, and then run a foot race on the Balloonfest 500 track," said Michigan Challenge Director Michelle Tokan. "Along the 'assembly line' they will visit booths and attractions in the new Landing Zone destination."

Also in the Landing Zone is the Howell Conference & Nature Center, Citizens Insurance Family Fun Tent, 7-Eleven Summer of Slurpee Tour with gaming systems, samples and

giveaways, and the Howell High School football helmet will be inflated so kids can run through it like the football players do before each home game.

On Sunday near the arts festival in the Landing Zone, Antique Appraisals, presented by The Livingston Antique Outlet are offered from noon - 4 p.m. Carry in items only please, \$5 per item.

The Landing Zone is sponsored by LaFontaine Automotive Group and C & L Ward Bros.

Basketball fans can take to the courts at balloonfest this year

At the launch site on Saturday and Sunday from 3 – 5 p.m., score some points at the PNC Pistons Party. Meet Hooper, the Piston's mascot, Automation and Palace Patrol members and participate in games and special activities at the PNC tent.

On Saturday, June 26 cheer on players in the first balloonfest basketball tournament located just north of the historic Livingston County courthouse from 8 a.m. – 6 p.m. The tournament is sponsored by Asahi Kasei Plastics North America Inc. and presented by Red Hacker Basketball.

Favorite attractions return for affordable family fun

A must-see attraction at the Michigan Challenge is the Saturday night balloon glow and night skydiving show. As darkness falls, 20 pilots will return from their competitive flights to inflate their balloons on the launch field. It is a never-to-be-forgotten sight as the many colors of the balloons are illuminated against the night sky. Then, the Renewal by Andersen Skydivers make a nighttime jump complete with pyrotechnics.

Daytime attractions include Windjammers stunt kite shows, music, games, carnival rides, comedy and juggling. Entertainment is sponsored by Atlas Home Improvement, American Laser Centers and Krug Ford.

America's Best Frisbee Dogs, sponsored by Meijer, jump back onto the field; and artists display their handcrafted work in the juried Arts Festival sponsored by Champion Chevrolet.

Parking passes are \$12/day or \$20 for a weekend pass. Discounted weekend passes are available for \$15 at any PNC Bank office in Livingston County until June 24. Passes include admission for everyone in the car. Parking is sponsored by Art Van and Michigan Remodeling Group.

For more information, call the Howell Area Chamber of Commerce at 517.546.3920 or visit the event website at michiganchallenge.com.

Destination downtown Howell

In addition to the new Balloonfest Basketball Tournament on Saturday, visitors to downtown Howell will enjoy great entertainment and activities, centered around the historic Livingston County Courthouse and on the sidewalks of the city.

Saturday is Saint Joseph Mercy Livingston Hospital Kid's Day with activity stations for kids set up on the courthouse lawn. See karate demonstrations, listen to story telling and create make-and-take recycled crafts as souvenirs of your balloonfest visit. There is also a bubble factory, watercolor painting, toddler tumbling, ceramics from The Ceramic Studio, and a hot-air balloon ornament to color and keep. Activities are presented by the Livingston County Family YMCA.

Sunday blossoms downtown with Howell's Sunday Farmer's Market for fresh produce and flowers.

And, all weekend long, shop downtown Howell for special promotions, sidewalk sales and activities. For details, visit ShopDowntownHowell.com.