

1st Riverbend Wellness Festival Promises Free "Whole Wellness" for Riverbend Community

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - Alton's first-ever free Riverbend Wellness Festival is set for next month and hundreds of people are already interested in the event, which will include ten keynote speakers, four "wellness workshops" and over 30 vendors.

From 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 13, 2024, community members will fill Milton Schoolhouse for a day of "Whole Wellness." Organizers Beth Ahlin and Stella Webb hope to see a big crowd, and they're asking local businesses to consider donating to the raffle, with all proceeds going to Amare, NFP. The goal, they said, is to promote community wellness.

"We'll have opportunities for individuals and families to seek wellness," Ahlin said. "I always tell people, somebody's way to wellness is their own way. So to have

opportunities for anybody, families, individuals, to seek out wellness and to be able to talk to the people who can get them there, it's super cool. And the huge overarching focus is community and community wellness."

Ahlin owns [CE Ahlin Counseling](#), based at Milton Schoolhouse. When Webb, who owns [Soul Sanctuary](#) at Milton, approached her about collaborating on a wellness event, the idea quickly grew into the festival it is today.

They decided to bring in local speakers to give 20-minute keynote speeches, and they found practitioners to offer breakout sessions, including a mental health workshop and spiritual health workshop. Webb will be hosting meditations, and attendees can also check out yoga, ecstatic dance and art therapy sessions.

While many people view self-care as an individual experience, Ahlin and Webb wanted to focus on the whole family. There will be several kid zones and places for children to play and get involved in the wellness workshops.

The idea of wellness can be overwhelming to some, and a lot of people aren't sure where to start or how to sustain self-care practices. But both women promise that attendees can come as they are and take from the event whatever is beneficial to them. In their own businesses, Ahlin and Webb often help people decide what wellness looks like for each person, and they hope the festival can do that for attendees, too.

"That's a big part of what I do, allowing people to heal some wounds from the past or from the present, allowing them to find a way to come and to heal those things so that they can learn the lessons and the wisdom and keep making a beautiful life for themselves," Webb said. "We wanted to show them ways to be able to implement this for their lives and to be able to maybe change things up so that they can live healthier physically, healthier mentally/emotionally and healthier spiritually for that overall wellness."

The Riverbend Wellness Festival will also raise money for [Amare, NFP](#), an organization based in Wood River that provides [help to people struggling with substance use disorders](#). The vendors have paid \$20 to rent their tables for the day, and attendees can enter a raffle for prizes from businesses across the Riverbend. All proceeds will go to Amare.

"I believe that when we help places like Amare, we're not just helping individuals, which is important, right?" Webb said. "But we're also helping the community at large."

Ahlin and Webb are still looking for businesses to contribute to the raffle. They also hope to host a few food trucks during the event, and there is space at Milton for the food trucks to stay indoors and covered. There is an open invite for any face painters, henna

artists or others who can help “give it that extra pop of feeling like a festival,” Ahlin explained. For more information about donating or signing up as a food truck or artist, contact Webb at altonsoulsanctuary@gmail.com.

Other than the vendors and food trucks, everything at the fair is completely free. For more information about the Riverbend Wellness Festival, visit the [official Facebook event page](#) and check it often for updates on keynote speakers, workshops and vendors as Jan. 13, 2024, approaches. Ahlin and Webb hope to help many community members develop their wellness practices during the event.

“The village component too, we just don’t have that like we used to,” Ahlin added. “And so finding ways for people, mothers, individuals, families, whoever to connect to their community and their people — building those strong connections is make it or break it for so many people...It’s really cool to be a part of a space that is so community-focused and that is so supportive of the community as well.”