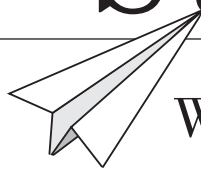


steppin' out



We Recommend: Culture, News + Reviews

Lanterns Light Memphis Night

By Kimberly Ham

As the sun begins to set over Shelby Farms Park on Saturday, May 16th, the Water Lantern Festival promises an evening that is equal parts celebration and reflection. Beginning at 5 p.m., the event transforms the park into a lively community gathering filled with food trucks, local vendors, yard games, music, and families and friends soaking in the atmosphere before the night takes a more meaningful turn.

“The balance is really the heart of everything we do,” says Tess Rowser, marketing manager for the Water Lantern Festival organization. “It begins as a celebration ... and as the sun starts to set, it naturally shifts into something more reflective.”

That transition is what has made the traveling festival resonate with audiences across the country — and particularly in Memphis, where the event has returned to Shelby Farms Park for five years. As twilight approaches, guests decorate floating lanterns with handwritten messages of hope, gratitude, remembrance, or personal dreams. A guided meditation and community storytelling help slow the pace before the lantern launch ceremony begins.

“It’s something you participate in, not just observe,” Rowser says. “People are often surprised by how emotional and meaningful it becomes.”

Once released onto the water, the lanterns create a glowing display that feels both intimate and communal. Some attendees honor loved ones. Others celebrate milestones, relationships, or fresh starts. Rowser recalls attending a festival with her family in memory of her nephew, describing it as a rare opportunity to grieve, reflect, and celebrate together in a shared space.

This year’s festival arrives as part of the organization’s new “Radiant Tour,” built around the message “We shine brighter together.” Expect interactive photo ops, themed prompts, and moments designed to encourage connection throughout the evening.

The event is designed for all ages and experiences — whether it’s a family outing, date night, girls’ night, or solo evening of reflection. General admission includes a lantern kit, marker, drawstring bag, playing cards, conversation prompts, and entry into a scavenger hunt giveaway. Date Night packages include two tickets and a shared blanket package.

Rowser’s advice for first-time attendees? “Don’t rush the experience. Slow down and be fully present. The more you lean into it, the more you’ll get out of the night.” ■



PHOTO: COURTESY SHAYLEE QUICK

A child joins in launching her lantern on the water.

WATER LANTERN FESTIVAL, SHELBY FARMS PARK, 6903 GREAT VIEW DRIVE NORTH, SATURDAY, MAY 16, 5 P.M.

VARIOUS DAYS & TIMES May 14th - 20th

Teacher’s Night Out

Dixon Gallery & Gardens, Friday, May 15, 5-7 p.m.

Educators are invited to enjoy an after-hours evening of light refreshments, artmaking, and gallery tours while connecting with fellow teachers and exploring the museum. Open to educators at every level. Supplies included.

Bumble Bee Atlas Community Science Workshop

Overton Park, Saturday, May 16, 9:30 am-2:30 p.m.

Help protect disappearing pollinators at a hands-on Bumble Bee Atlas training workshop with Overton Park Conservancy and the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. Participants will learn about bumble bee ecology and conservation, plus how to catch, photograph, and identify bumble bees in the

field as part of a community science effort tracking Southeastern species. The indoor/outdoor workshop is pay-what-you-can, with a suggested \$10 donation. Registration required.

Family Fun Day

Metal Museum, Sunday, May 17, 11 am-3 p.m.

Bring the whole family to the Metal Museum for this free community event that features hands-on activities, live demonstrations, and kid-friendly games across the museum grounds, offering an engaging afternoon of creative and educational fun for all ages. Guests can also enjoy free admission to the museum throughout the day.

Cyanotyping Botanical Printing

Midtown Bramble & Bloom, Sunday, May 16, 2 p.m.

Create art with sunshine at a Cyano-

typing Botanical Printing workshop. Participants will learn the cyanotype process using fresh flowers and botanicals to design a one-of-a-kind printed tote bag to take home, with all materials included. Guests can also upgrade to print on a personal fabric item and are invited to bring snacks and drinks for a relaxed, creative afternoon. Rain date is Sunday, May 17th.

Story Time at Novel

Novel, Saturday, May 16, 10:30 am

Recommended for children up to 5 years old, the weekly gathering features songs, stories, and a mix of brand-new books and beloved favorites. This special story time event is partnered with Voices of the South.