

## Freedom Fest Comes To Hernando

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Hernando Today

BROOKSVILLE - When more than 20,000 people showed up for the family-friendly, faith-based "Freedom Fest" Independence Day festival last year in Pinellas Park, deputies had to turn people away at the gates.

This year, the free concert and fireworks extravaganza is expanding to Hernando County, with plenty of space to spare.

Thursday, interested business sponsors will meet at 6 p.m. at the Rising Sun Cafe in Brooksville to discuss the festival, slated to take place July 3 off Lockhart Road near Interstate 75 in Brooksville.

Hosted by the Brooksville Ministerial Association, the event aims to provide locals with a faith-based, Christ-centered Fourth of July Celebration.

Rob Taylor, former NFL offensive lineman for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, will deliver a gospel presentation just prior to the festival's main event: A concert by musician Matthew West, currently No. 1 on contemporary Christian music charts.

"It's going to be the biggest Fourth of July Celebration Hernando County has ever had," said Rev. Joe Santerelli, pastor for Hillside Community Baptist Church in Brooksville and president of the BMA.

The event will be alcohol-free and will conclude with a pyrotechnics fireworks display.

Other local bands will also perform - such as Brooksville-based My Brother's Scars - and a well-known national hip-hop act also may be added to the lineup soon, Santerelli said.

A new aspect to the festival is an all-day local talent competition, slated for May 31, in which the winners will open this year's Freedom Fest with a performance.

The event will also include a Family Fun Zone, with inflatable games for children and numerous other games and food vendors.

It will be emceed by DJs from Sarasota-based The JOY FM (88.1 and 91.5), and is expected to draw listeners from Naples to Gainesville.

This will mark the festival's third year.

Previously held in Pinellas Park, the festival drew 10,000 visitors in 2006 and 20,000 in 2007.

With plans contingent on Hernando County Commission approval on May 6, officials are planning the concert for a combination site of more than 50 acres off Lockhart Road.

"Just in the sit-down area alone, (the site) can hold up to 30,000 people," Santerelli said. "It will be big enough to have room for everybody."

With letters being sent out today to inform neighbors who live near the site, Santerelli also plans to meet with neighbors prior to the event to explain its purpose.

With organizational and planning help from Jon Ferris from Pinellas Park, he estimated that the event will cost more than \$80,000 to produce.

There will be a \$5 parking charge, but no cost for the event itself.

For more information, call Santerelli at 352-263-1551.