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Contact: Debra Stallings, Fundraising Event Coordinator  
Phone: (810) 724-6135  
E-mail: [dbstallings@gmail.com](mailto:dbstallings@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.michiganfestivalofgourds.com](http://www.michiganfestivalofgourds.com)



## **Local Artists, Chefs and Growers to Celebrate Gourds at 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Festival of Gourds**

Imlay City, MI – Local gourd artists, Ron and Debbie Stallings are hosting the 2nd Annual Festival of Gourds at the Eastern Michigan Fairgrounds August 26-28 (10-6 Fri & Sat, 10-5 Sun). The festival is a family-friendly event celebrating gourds, art, food, music and community. Admission is \$5.00. Children ages 12yrs and under are free. Proceeds from the Festival will benefit the Children’s Hospital of Michigan Foundation. “Last year, the turnout was better than expected,” says event co-chair Debbie Stallings, “the joint effort raised \$8000 towards the charity.” She also said they are expecting more than 2,000 visitors at this year's event.

The Festival of Gourds is a chance to gather growers, artists, enthusiasts and the general public to share their knowledge and interest of gourds. Educational classes will also be offered such as: wood burning, carving, coiling and embroidering on gourds as well as the ‘basics’ in Gourding 101. Children’s activities include a ‘Nasgourd Derby’ race and ‘make and take’ gourd crafts. For a full schedule of events, classes and registration, you can visit the festival website ([www.michiganfestivalofgourds.com](http://www.michiganfestivalofgourds.com)).

Other events and activities that feature gourds include: A special program by musician, Guy Louis, dance performances by the Tropical Wahines, “Porch Stories” with Alfreda Harris and a gourd-art competition judged by the local Michiganourders Gourd Guild.

A new addition to the festival this year is a local foods showcase called **Grow Michigan**. Sponsored by the Lapeer County Master Gardeners, ‘Grow Michigan’ will feature a number of local food growers and producers. Visitors to the festival will be able to buy locally produced foods they can enjoy during their visit or take with them. Included in the selection will be hot sandwiches, artisan breads, intriguing desserts, home-grown produce, herbal mixes and more. This is also a great opportunity for those who have a local food product produced under the Michigan Cottage Industry Law or who have locally grown fruits and vegetables to sell their product. Vending booth spaces are available for a fee. Interested vendors can download an application by following the Grow Michigan link on the festival website homepage.

As a special tribute to the community, farmers and region, Chef Michael Romine is hosting a **Harvest Dinner** on Saturday, August 27 at 6:30 pm using as many local ingredients as he can forage. Tickets are \$15 per person and available by calling 810-724-6135.

Stallings admits that this may be the only gourd-related festival that also raises funds for a Children’s Hospital. It’s become a special focus in their life and she and Ron enjoy seeing their work benefit others. Proceeds for the event go towards research and programs at the Pediatric Cystic Fibrosis center at DMC Children’s Hospital of Michigan.