



# FREEDOM WEEKEND

Memorial Day event one of many activities offered in Simpsonville

*By Chris Worthy  
Contributing Writer*

No matter the season, Simpsonville residents and visitors can fill their calendars with events that evoke memories of days gone by or bring the latest in music and entertainment to the Golden Strip.

Summer kicks off in high style at Freedom Weekend Aloft, held each Memorial Day weekend at Heritage Park. What began

as a hot air balloon festival has expanded to include music, fitness and lots more. Keri Hall, the festival's director, said the venue has allowed for expansion, creating an event that offers something for everyone.

"We hope Freedom Weekend Aloft and the people of Simpsonville will be synonymous for many, many years — forevermore," Hall said. "We have hot air balloons and a four-day nonstop music festival. An emphasis on family will always be a huge

component of this event."

With Greenville Hospital System serving as title sponsor, Hall said promoting a healthy, active lifestyle is an important part of the event, which now includes cycling, a 5K and lacrosse.

"Simpsonville has opened so many doors for this event, as has the partnership with GHS and Bi-Lo," Hall said. "Since 2007, we have found ourselves embraced by the community."

The Charter Amphitheatre at Heritage Park is the site of the Freedom Weekend Aloft's diverse music festival.

"What was already a dream venue — the amphitheatre took it over the top," Hall said. "You'll find every genre of music — country, contemporary Christian, blues, patriotic, reggae. There is something for every musical taste, and that's by design."

The festival also includes children's activities and of course, the signature hot air balloons, which entice visitors even while still on the ground.

"There have been years when Mother Nature makes it difficult to fly," Hall said. "But even in the worst years, those pilots have set up the balloons for people to enjoy."

Throughout the summer, residents are now able to enjoy a bounty of local goods at the Simpsonville Farmers' Market, held in the parking lot of Cotton Mill Place on South Street. The market is open 3:30 – 6:30 p.m. Thursdays, May – October.

"We've got lots of lovely vegetable vendors, honey, Great Harvest bread, a French baker, peanuts, soaps, plants – all sorts of marvelous things," said Amanda Hudson,

the market's organizer. "We only accept local products. It has to be grown or made within 50 miles to be allowed in."

The market was well received in 2010 by vendors and shoppers, according to Hudson.

"It's usually a lot cheaper than what you buy at the supermarket," Hudson said. "It's great for our local producers. The money goes back into the local economy. People like buying local and it's nice to be able to talk to the one who grows it."

Rounding out the summer is the city's popular Labor Day Family Fun Festival, celebrating its 37th year in 2011. The event has become a tradition for many.

"The Labor Day Festival has become a go-to place for family fun," said Simpsonville Area Chamber of Commerce President Kelly Wilkins. "This past year, we had record numbers in attendance."

The festival runs Saturday, Sunday and Monday of Labor Day weekend and includes food, games, rides, music, a touch-a-truck event, an antique car show and more. Now held on Main Street, the event surrounds the city's iconic clock tower and is a true community festival. And with the

2010 attendance at its highest ever, Wilkins said the future looks bright for the end-of-summer event.

"We hope to have more things for families to do, while still keeping it affordable and showcasing Simpsonville," she said.

Rounding out the calendar for regular events are two perennial favorites. The South Greenville Fair is held the fourth Saturday in September at Simpsonville's City Park. It includes old-fashioned crafts and farm life demonstrations, competitions that allow children to showcase their farm and livestock handling talents and a tractor show. And to celebrate the Christmas season, Simpsonville residents flock to Main Street for the city's parade, held the first Sunday afternoon in December.

Throughout the year, music fills the air as headliners entertain at the Charter Amphitheatre at Heritage Park. The Blues, Brews and BBQ Festival, and Independence Day Celebration, as well as a full slate of acts, including Willie Nelson, BB King and more, bring in visitors from across the Upstate and give local residents a chance to enjoy world class talent in their own back yard.



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