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Fredericksburg Food & Wine Festival Partners with Southern Smoke Foundation to Expand Relief for Hill Country Food & Beverage Workers

Hospitality Worker Emergency Fund now offers broader eligibility and new mental health resources

FREDERICKSBURG, Texas—August 12, 2026—The [Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce](#) Events Foundation, producer of the [Fredericksburg Food & Wine Festival](#) (FFWF), today announced a new partnership with the [Southern Smoke Foundation](#) (SSF) to expand support available through its Hill Country Hospitality Worker Emergency Relief Fund (HCH Relief Fund).

The fund, created by the FFWF, provides emergency financial assistance to hospitality workers in Gillespie County, Mason County, Llano County, and Blanco County facing medical expenses, transportation emergencies, essential family needs, and other unforeseen circumstances. Through its partnership with Southern Smoke Foundation, the initiative will also connect local food and beverage workers to SSF's emergency relief and no-cost mental health counseling programs, increasing awareness of these existing resources and deepening support across the Hill Country and throughout the state of Texas.

The partnership comes as many Hill Country hospitality workers continue to feel the financial effects of the July 2026 flooding, even though most local businesses were not closed long enough to qualify for large-scale disaster relief funds. By connecting workers to SSF's programs, FFWF can now offer support to individuals whose hardship might otherwise fall outside the scope of traditional crisis relief.

"Even when a business never had to close its doors, the people who work there can still be hit hard by something like this flooding. This partnership with Southern Smoke means we can finally say yes to more of our hospitality workers, not just the ones whose employer shut down for weeks. It broadens who we can help and it gives them a mental health resource on top of financial relief," said Jim Mikula, President & CEO of the Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce.

"Food and beverage workers are often the last to get asked if they're okay, even when they're the ones holding a community together during a crisis. We're proud to partner with the Fredericksburg Food & Wine Festival to make sure Hill Country workers have a direct path to both emergency funds and mental health support," said Catarina Bill, Chief Mission Officer of the Southern Smoke Foundation.

Southern Smoke Foundation offers three ways for eligible hospitality workers to get help:

Large-Scale Crisis Relief — for workers affected by natural disasters and other widescale emergencies:

<https://southernsmoke.tfaforms.net/67>

Emergency Relief Fund — confidential crisis relief grants for individual, unforeseen circumstances such as accidents, medical issues, or changes in circumstance: [Emergency Relief Fund application](#)

Behind You Mental Health Program — up to 20 no-cost counseling sessions, offered in person and via telehealth, with financial assistance available for those outside participating states:

<https://www.southernsmoke.org/mental-health/>

To qualify for SSF's programs, applicants must work a minimum of 30 hours a week in the food and beverage industry for at least six months with a taxable income. Multiple industry roles can be combined to meet the hourly requirement, and unforeseen crises must have occurred within six months of application.

It is also possible for anyone to donate directly to the fund at <https://fbgfoodandwine.com/donate/>.

About the Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce:

The mission of the Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce is to champion the Fredericksburg business community through collaboration, information and service. The Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce proudly represents the diverse and growing business community of Gillespie County, just like it has for 106 years.

About Fredericksburg Food and Wine Festival:

The Fredericksburg Food & Wine Festival is a non-profit organization that celebrates, showcases and nurtures our region's rich agricultural heritage, outstanding culinary experiences and award-winning wineries. Through their programs and events, they support charitable organizations in the Texas Hill Country, ensuring prosperity and innovation within the community.

About Southern Smoke Foundation:

Founded in 2015 by award-winning chef Chris Shepherd and Executive Director Lindsey Brown, Southern Smoke Foundation provides access to no-cost mental health services through its program, Behind You, and emergency relief funding to food and beverage workers experiencing crisis nationwide. This includes restaurant, bar, and cafe workers; farmers and ranchers; winemakers, distillers, and brewers; and anyone in the industry faced with financial hardship because of a medical emergency, accident or other unforeseen incident.

To date, Southern Smoke Foundation has granted more than \$16.5 million to food and beverage workers nationwide and, since 2020, has provided access to over 12,000 no-cost counseling sessions to F+B workers in California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Washington D.C.

In 2026, SSF received a prestigious Impact Award from the James Beard Foundation, recognizing the organization's tireless efforts and significant contributions to the U.S. food and beverage industry. To support Southern Smoke Foundation or to apply for assistance, visit southernsmoke.org.

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