

The City of Belleview
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City of Belleview and Sheltering Hands, Inc. Announce Partnership to Host 2026 PAW Chili Challenge at Lake Lillian

Belleview, FL – The City of Belleview is excited to announce a new partnership with Sheltering Hands, Inc., a recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, to host the PAW Chili Challenge on Saturday, January 24, 2026, from 12:00 PM to 4:00 PM at Lake Lillian Park. This family-friendly event raises funds to benefit both Sheltering Hands and the United Way of Marion County, two organizations dedicated to bettering the lives of animals and people across the region.

With free general admission, attendees will enjoy a packed afternoon including:

- A chili cookoff competition featuring both an open category and an officially sanctioned CASI (Chili Appreciation Society International) division
- A People's Choice competition, with wristbands available for purchase to sample chili entries and vote
- A vendor marketplace with handcrafted goods, local services, and unique finds
- A variety of food trucks offering delicious options for every taste
- A car show sure to impress auto enthusiasts
- Inflatables, games, music, and interactive activities for kids and families

"This partnership represents everything Belleview stands for in our mission of community engagement," said Robert Vass, Events & Promotions Manager for the City of Belleview. "The PAW Chili Challenge offers a day of food and fun while also serving as a way for our city to give back to causes that make a difference. We're honored to work with Sheltering Hands to bring this event to life and look forward to seeing the area around Lake Lillian filled with families enjoying a day filled with fun and the smell of fresh chili. This is a day where everyone wins—especially the animals and individuals supported by these two incredible nonprofits."

April LeSage, Executive Director of Sheltering Hands, Inc., added, "We are incredibly grateful to partner with the City of Belleview for the 2026 PAW Chili Challenge. This event is a great time for all that attend and an opportunity to educate on the amazing work our partner organizations do every day in the compassionate care of animals. Taking part in the challenge, shelters and rescues get a chance to playfully educate the community of resources and services they have available and that we cannot do this without the support of the community. The funds raised help us continue our mission to provide affordable care and life bettering programs for cats across Marion County. We hope to see families, foodies, animal lovers, and chili enthusiasts come together for the day."

A portion of the proceeds from the event will go to support the United Way of Marion County, a longstanding community partner of the City of Belleview. United Way works to improve lives by focusing on the building blocks of a good life: education, financial stability, and health. Their initiatives support a wide range of local services, including school readiness programs, job skills training, and access to healthcare. The City is proud to continue its support of United Way's mission through events like the PAW Chili Challenge.

Sheltering Hands, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to improving the lives of cats through compassionate, community-based services. Their programs include low-cost feline spay/neuter services, a trap-neuter-return (TNR) initiative, cat colony caregiver support, a full range of cat adoption services and operates a thrift store in Lady Lake. Sheltering Hands operates with a belief in proactive, humane solutions to animal overpopulation and is a vital resource for cat lovers and caretakers throughout Greater Ocala area.

Registration for chili cookoff teams and car show participants is available at www.shelteringhands.org. For information on registering as a vendor for the marketplace, visit www.belleviewfl.org/172/local-events.