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Festival of Nations to return to St. Paul in 2026 with a new name

The International Festival of Minnesota will run April 10 and 11 at RiverCentre



Brightly decorated patio umbrellas mark one the dining areas at the 2018 Festival of Nations at the St. Paul RiverCentre. The last Festival of Nations was held in 2019, but it will return in 2026 under a new name: the International Festival of Minnesota. (John Autey / Pioneer Press)



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After the pandemic knocked it out of business, Festival of Nations will return in 2026 under a new name, the International Festival of Minnesota.

The event — which features global cuisine, music, dance, artisan crafts, storytelling and cultural demonstrations from more than 60 nations and ethnic communities — will take place April 10 and 11 at RiverCentre in downtown St. Paul. Tickets will go on sale in October, with pricing to be announced.

Twin Cities Jazz Festival founder Steve Heckler is heading up a new nonprofit that will stage the event.

“I was director of Festival of Nations for eight years, from 2005 to 2012, and I would say it was one of the highlights of my life,” Heckler said. “Many of us who were involved with the festival for a long period of time felt there was like a hole left in the community. About a year ago, a few of us got together and said this is a needed event. It was great for the community and many of the ethnic groups who live here. It started off as talk and it started growing.”

Founded in 1932 as a street fair, Festival of Nations became a tradition, both for the students bused in on field trips and for the general public.

The pandemic forced its cancellation in 2020. It didn't return in the following years and organizers announced it was [permanently shuttered](#) in 2023.

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When he decided it was time to relaunch, Heckler put together a new board of directors

“Literally everyone I called wanted to be part of it,” he said. “They all wanted to see this event come back. There are some people on this team who were involved for 50 years. They were dancing as children at this festival, and now they’re volunteering their time to make the festival happen again. I’m very happy that the team we had returned.”

While much of the event will look the same — Heckler purchased the old Festival of Nations cafe fronts and other assets — the name change is meant to signal a fresh start.

“We needed to have a new way to look at it,” Heckler said. “Ethnic communities are not necessarily where they were 30 years ago and we wanted to reflect that. We want to maintain the feel and essence of what the festival has been, but we also have to take it to new places. And we’re hoping that people who loved it will return.”

International Festival of Minnesota

What: A food, music and cultural exposition

When: April 10-11, 2026

Where: RiverCentre in downtown St. Paul

Info: Tickets go on sale in October; visit ifestmn.org for more information

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