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EXPLORE WHAT MAKES US HUMAN AT THE 16TH ANNUAL WISCONSIN SCIENCE FESTIVAL

by Callie Kositzke

Have you ever wondered: what makes me human? Explore the many answers to that question at the [2026 Wisconsin Science Festival](#) in a jam-packed 10 days devoted to the science of humans and the humans who do science.

With more than 650 events across the state, festival goers will unpack “Us” – the feature for this year’s festival – from the complexity of the human experience to our bodies to our place in the cosmos.

Now in its 16th year, the festival has grown from a local 3-day event in Madison to a 10-day art and science showcase in over 55 counties across Wisconsin. As a member of the Science Festival Alliance, the festival continues to serve as a flagship model for engagement and collaboration.

“The Wisconsin Science Festival is a celebration of curiosity in action, inviting people of all ages and from every corner of our state to explore, ask questions and discover something new,” says Samantha Mulrooney, director of the Wisconsin Science Festival at the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery. “It’s also a chance to shine a light on the incredible innovative and creative minds who make Wisconsin such a special place.”

The festival kicks off with fan-favorite [Science on the Square](#) on Thursday, October 15. In collaboration with the Madison Night Market, the event provides hands-on science exploration for all ages interspersed with food trucks, local artisans, and a picturesque view of the Capitol.

The fun doesn’t stop there. Through a variety of venues, from lab tours to community talks to nature hikes, the science of Us is sure to make an impact somewhere near you.

Some of the extraordinary humans participating in the festival this year include:

- Forward Madison FC: Get a kick out of Science & Soccer Night at Breese Stevens Field.
- Genealogist Caron Brennan: Find out the how and why behind DNA testing in genealogical research in Door County.
- Former scientist and stand-up comedian Sarah Adelman: Blow your mind with the creator of “BLOW MY MIND” at the Rigby Pub.
- Illusionist Steve Belliveau: Enjoy an afternoon of magic, engineering, and humor that “brings science down to earth” in Westby.

- Your local librarians: At participating libraries across the state, grab one of over 3,000 take-home science kits brought to you by the popular “Science in a Bag” project, now in its sixth year.

A central goal of the Wisconsin Science Festival is to celebrate the powerful intersection of art and science. This idea is especially relevant to us, as creativity is an integral part of the human experience. Several of this year’s events highlight how this intersection enriches our lives, including a stroll through the John D. Wiley Gallery for Art in Science, an evening of “magic” of glass, bubbles, and flames at the Bergstrom-Mahler Museum of Glass, or the chance to create your own dragonfly or butterfly rain gauge at Hustisford Community Library.

The [Wisconsin Book Festival](#), celebrating its 25th birthday this year, dovetails with its SciFest counterpart and has been a proud partner for over ten years, says book festival director Jane Rotonda. “Together our two festivals celebrate the power of storytelling and knowledge sharing, often with Wisconsin writers and researchers leading these important community conversations,” Rotonda says.

This year’s line-up of festival cross-over events will feature authors and audiences exploring the hidden world of parasites, discovering the impacts of xenotransplantation, marveling at the life-affirming experience of climbing a tree, and taking the plunge into some of the world’s most fascinating rivers.

So come join us Oct. 15–25 and get curious. With hundreds of events throughout the state, there’s something for all of us! For access to the full festival schedule and interactive map, visit the Wisconsin Science Festival website. Below, find a glimpse of the hundreds of events that will be held statewide:

[Northern WI](#) – Visit the Downtown Superior Farmer’s Market to learn more about tree planting projects; Head to the Namekagon River or St. Croix National Scenic Riverway visitor centers for Junior Ranger Day; celebrate Forest Products Week with a tour of the Rhinelander School District’s outdoor education and recreation center and a trivia night at Rhinelander Brewing Company; and more!

[West Central WI](#) – Explore the Family Science Fest Expo at the Pablo Center at the Confluence; Stop by the Hudson Area Public Library for a chance to win a STEAM-Tastic Book!; Enjoy an afternoon of magic, engineering, and humor that “brings science down to earth” with illusionist Steve Belliveau in Westby; and more!

[Northeast WI](#) – Get your hands dirty and gather plant data for community research at the Hortonville Public Library; Bring your crew for Family Astronomy Night at the Barlow Planetarium; Dive into a hands-on ocean science adventure with The Calista Initiative; and spend an evening with the “magic” of glass, bubbles, and flames at the Bergstrom-Mahler Museum of Glass.

[Madison](#) – Kick off the festival with fan-favorite Science on the Square, presented with Madison Night Market and later, get a kick out of Science & Soccer Night at Breese Stevens Field; Enjoy a high-energy mashup of science talks, artful performances, and live music at the

Why Sci Variety Show; Touch a real human brain at the Health Sciences Learning Center during the UW-Madison Campus Open House; and more!

[Southeast WI](#) – Design and draw your own 3D optical illusions at the Cedarburg Public Library; Immerse yourself in the Wisconsin Weather and Planetarium Show at the Retzer Nature Center; Be a scientist for a day at the New Berlin Public Library's BioBlitz day; and more!

[Statewide](#) – Unpack the science of Us with "Science in a Bag": kits are available at 72 local libraries across the state!