

## Blessings in a Backpack names celebrity chef for fall fundraiser

Mar 23, 2026



Fort Wayne/Allen County

Celebrity chef named for fundraiser

Blessings in a Backpack's fall fundraiser will feature Top Chef winner Brooke Williamson for its 2026 Celebrity Chef Dinner scheduled for Sept. 8 at Sycamore Hills Golf Club.

Williamson, an acclaimed chef, restaurateur and culinary innovator, has become one of America's most celebrated chefs. A Los Angeles native, Brooke draws deeply from the bounty of Southern California's ingredients and her own sense of nostalgia for her cooking.

In addition to winning season 14 of Bravo's Top Chef reality show, Williamson won Food Network's Tournament of Champions. She is one of three Culinary Titans on Food Network's Bobby's Triple Threat and has served as a judge on various culinary shows.

Tickets are \$800 each. All proceeds will go toward feeding local children through Blessings in a Backpack's programming.

Additional information on tickets and sponsorship can be found online at [www.blessingsindiana.org/celebritychef2026](http://www.blessingsindiana.org/celebritychef2026).

## Salute scheduled for Vietnam vets

The Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum will pay tribute to all local Vietnam veterans whose names are inscribed on the Vietnam Memorial Wall during a ceremony at 11 a.m. Sunday at the Sterling Chapel, 2122 O'Day Road, Fort Wayne.

March 29 is National Vietnam Veterans Day. In honor of all soldiers who were killed in combat, local veterans will read the names of Allen County veterans, as well as veterans from surrounding counties.

The ceremony will include remarks by 1st Vice Cmdr. Eric Johnson; reading of the “Soldiers Prayer,” reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance and performance of the national anthem. The event will close with the playing of taps.

## **Literary Alliance CEO retiring early**

Melinda Haines, CEO of The Literacy Alliance, will retire this summer following six years of leadership with the organization, officials announced Monday.

Her decision follows a recent diagnosis of acute myeloid leukemia. Although her prognosis is favorable, the treatment plan requires significant time and recovery, making it difficult for her to continue fulfilling all responsibilities of the role in the months ahead.

“After thoughtful consideration, Haines and the board agreed that this transition is the right step to ensure the organization continues to have the steady leadership needed to support its mission and the community it serves,” the nonprofit said in a news release.

A search committee composed of board members, staff and community leaders will begin the process of identifying the next CEO in the coming weeks.

The position is posted at [www.literacyalliance.org/jobs](http://www.literacyalliance.org/jobs).

The organization encourages qualified candidates and community members to share the opportunity within their networks.

– The Journal Gazette