

# Building Global Barbecue Connections for 48 Years: Memphis in May Welcomes Open Fire World Championship in 2026

*Expanding Memphis' global barbecue appeal at the 2026 World Championship*

*Barbecue Cooking Contest following the 2025 South Korea Hongseong Global BBQ Festival.*

MEMPHIS, TN, UNITED STATES, November 13, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The smoke signals of

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*Mack Weaver, President and CEO of Memphis In May*

Memphis barbecue are reaching around the world as Memphis in May celebrates 48 years of barbecue excellence. The World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest is igniting a new chapter in live-fire cooking with the launch of the inaugural 2026 Open Fire World Championship, featuring international open-fire sensation Al Frugoni.

For nearly half a century, the World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest has been the ultimate proving ground for pitmasters and teams from across the globe, earning its title as the “Super Bowl of Swine.” Now, as Memphis in May looks toward the future and continues to

evolve, the Open Fire World Championship will expand the festival footprint, celebrating the ancient art and modern innovation of open-flame cooking. Internationally acclaimed Argentine-born chef and live-fire specialist Al Frugoni will headline this groundbreaking event, bringing his global following and signature open-fire style to the most prestigious barbecue cooking contest on earth. Al Frugoni, known worldwide for his dynamic open-fire techniques and fiery culinary creativity, is excited about this new competition and how it will shine a continued global spotlight on the city of Memphis.

The addition of the Open Fire World Championship to the legendary World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest (WCBCC) comes on the heels of Memphis in May being featured in the Hongseong Global BBQ Festival with nearly 600,000 attendees in South Korea—strengthening international ties and spotlighting Memphis as the global epicenter of barbecue culture. While in South Korea, Memphis In May CEO, Mack Weaver, led several strategic discussions with global leaders who represented Hongseong and the Hongseong Global BBQ

Festival. Memphis In May served as an international model of excellence as Mr. Weaver helped Hongseong officials identify areas of opportunity and improvement within their current festival. He met with leadership from the International Festival & Events Association (Asia) to help them better understand how to master non-governmental sponsorships, and he met with PhD. students from Pai Chai University who wanted to learn the financial aspects of festival planning. The impact of Memphis In May and the World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest continue to be highlighted and appreciated across the world, demonstrating why this festival serves as a benchmark for excellence for cities and festivals all over the globe.



2026 Open Fire World Championship Logo

“For 48 years, Memphis in May has been the heartbeat of barbecue,” said Mack Weaver, President & CEO of Memphis in May International Festival. “Following our incredible experience at the Hongseong Global BBQ Festival in South Korea, it’s clear that barbecue is a universal language. With Al Frugoni leading the Open Fire World Championship, we’re bringing even more international flavor, creativity, and connection to Memphis.”

2026 Open Fire World Championship contestants can expect fierce competition as the inaugural event will welcome the best 15 open fire competition teams from around the world. Open Fire World Championship contestants will battle it out in Liberty Park, showcasing a diversity of techniques inspired by traditions from Argentina to Asia.

Festival attendees will of course continue to have the exciting opportunity to “taste the ‘cue” and take in the sizzling spectacle of the new Open Fire World Championship! Four blazing open fire stations will heat up to prepare beef, pork, chicken, lamb, alligator, octopus, and more from Thursday evening through Saturday — providing guests another opportunity to enjoy The Ultimate Food Experience!

Team applications for the 2026 World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest and the Junior World Championship Cooking Contest are now open. Applications for the Open Fire World Championship will open in December 2025. Visit our website at [www.memphisinmay.org](http://www.memphisinmay.org) and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and X for the official application opening date.

The 2026 World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest promises to be the most exciting yet, uniting the world's best barbecue and open-fire competitors in the heart of Memphis. From traditional slow-smoked ribs to the sparks and spectacle of live flame, the 2026 event will embody the spirit of innovation and cultural exchange that continues to define Memphis in May.

#### About Memphis in May International Festival

Memphis in May International Festival is a 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1977 with a mission to promote and celebrate Memphis culture, foster economic growth, and enhance international awareness through education. The organization fulfills this mission through a year-round celebration featuring educational programs, cultural exchange, and world-class events such as the World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest (est. 1978) and the Great American River Run (est. 2015).

For nearly five decades, Memphis in May has showcased the best of Memphis to the world—and the world to Memphis. Recognized globally for excellence, the festival has earned more than 250 prestigious Pinnacle Awards from the International Festivals and Events Association and was named one of Travel + Leisure's "Festivals Worth Traveling For."

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