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Chalk the Walk announces 2026 dates, times, application links; festival to honor the 250th Anniversary of the United States while showcasing internationally-recognized artist, author, and motivational speaker John Bramblitt.

The City of Mount Vernon, Mount Vernon Parks and Recreation and the Mount Vernon Area Arts Council (MVAAC) have announced the dates for the 21st annual Chalk the Walk, Iowa's first and largest Madonnari Festival. The two-day festival will take place Saturday and Sunday, May 2 and 3, 2026, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day along Mount Vernon's historic 1st Street.

The committee has chosen John Bramblitt's "Lady Liberty" as its large community piece this year. For a \$10 donation to the festival, any interested festival participant will be given a set of chalk sticks to create a single 2' by 2' square of a portion of this giant 40' x 80' colorful depiction of our Country's Statue of Liberty. When finished, a re-creation of the artwork will appear on Mount Vernon's historic 1st Street—created by dozens of artists of all ages and abilities.

"Mount Vernon and the Chalk the Walk committee wished to celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the United States and what better way to celebrate it than showcasing the talents of an artist who has overcome insurmountable odds," said Michael Mosier, Mount Vernon Area Arts Council member and liaison to the Chalk the Walk Committee. "The council and the committee both feel the colorful artwork John has created is exciting and transfers well to a community piece in chalk. We are excited to showcase his talents while celebrating 250 years of our nation."

This year's event also will feature the work of up to 166 artists creating original art in 8' by 10' rectangles chalked directly onto Mount Vernon's historic 1st Street. Last year's 1st Place Winner, Autumn Zaehring has been invited back to the event as the 2026 featured artist. Outdoor food vendors, children's activities and live music also will take place throughout both days of the event.

More than \$1,375 in cash prizes will be awarded to chalk artists this year, with a formal check presentation ceremony to take place Sunday afternoon, May 3.

Chalk the Walk is based on an original art form that began in Italy in the 16th century. Called Madonnari, this form of public art was originally done by street artists hoping to collect coins from passersby. Images back then were based on religious themes; as the Madonna (or Mary) was a popular subject, the artists became known as the "Madonnari."

About the Artist:

John Bramblitt is an internationally recognized artist, award winning author, and motivational speaker who lost his sight in 2001 due to epilepsy and Lyme disease. Turning to painting as a way to reconnect with the world, he became the world's first blind muralist and is considered the #1 blind painter, with his work reaching over 120 countries.

His art has been featured in major news outlets such as the New York Times, Washington Post, BBC, and Discovery Channel to name a few and exhibited globally, leading to collaborations with institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Guggenheim, and the Kennedy Center, as well as companies like Coca-Cola, Samsung Hennesy, and Delta—where he painted a Boeing 737 for Rock in Rio.

Named by the United States as a U.S. Cultural Ambassador, John has also worked with icons like Tony Hawk, Jeff Bridges, and Lyle Lovett to name a few. He continues to inspire through large-scale murals in cities such as New York, Dallas, Santa Monica, and Seoul, as well as through keynote speeches that energize audiences and his creative hub, The Yellow Dog Art Bar in Denton, Texas. His journey demonstrates the power of resilience, proving that obstacles can lead to new ways of seeing. <https://bramblitt.com/>

Applications are here

Application questions can be directed to mv.chalkthewalk@gmail.com.

- An artist application is available: bit.ly/Artists2026CTW
- A food vendor application (opens a pdf) is available: bit.ly/Vendors2026CTW
- A volunteer application is available: bit.ly/Volunteer2026CTW
- A sponsorship packet (opens a pdf) is available: bit.ly/Sponsorship2026CTW

About Mount Vernon

Historic Mount Vernon, Iowa, is home to 4,500 residents, including 1,200 college students enrolled at Cornell College. Located in Eastern Iowa at the intersection of Highways 30 and 1, 20 miles north of Iowa City and 15 miles east of Cedar Rapids, it boasts a vibrant uptown business community with numerous antique and specialty stores, restaurants, coffee houses, commercial art galleries, and three National Historic Districts.

