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For immediate release

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NOTE: Media interviews for a behind-the-scenes look are available with the Boerner Botanical Gardens Director and a China Lights representative/translator. Please call ahead.

Local Asian-American Community Hosts Moon Festival Weekend at China Lights at Boerner Botanical Gardens, Oct. 6–8

MILWAUKEE (Oct. 4, 2017) — In addition to dramatic displays of color, light, and sound, the Chinese lantern festival at Boerner Botanical Gardens will have special foods, workshops, and performances by the local Asian-American community during Moon Festival Weekend, Oct. 6–8.

China Lights: The Magic Returns is a celebration of Asian culture featuring 50 larger-than-life sculptural lantern displays illuminating 10 acres of Milwaukee's renowned Boerner Botanical Gardens, in Whitnall Park at 9400 Boerner Drive, Hales Corners, WI. The festival, presented by Tri City National Bank, also celebrates Asian culture with professional entertainment, a bustling marketplace, and a wide variety of food and beverage options. The event runs through Oct. 22, Tuesday through Sunday, from 5:30–10 p.m., with a 5 p.m. opening for people who purchase the VIP ticket package. The festival is closed Mondays.

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Moon Festival: Celebrating Family Reunion

Asia's mid-autumn Moon Festival celebrates family reunion and peace at a time when the moon is at its fullest and brightest of the year. Some of the most popular ways to celebrate the holiday include eating mooncakes (sweet cakes that symbolize family reunion), dining with family, appreciating the moon, and making lanterns. And all can be done during the China Lights Moon Festival Weekend hosted by the Milwaukee Chinese Community Center and OCA-Wisconsin.

Caring for the nation's extended family, the MCCC will present a check to the American Red Cross for hurricane relief, Friday at 6:50 p.m. at the Dragon Stage. The MCCC has raised over \$10,000 within the community since Hurricane Harvey made landfall on the Texas coast. During Moon Festival Weekend, MCCC will continue fundraising with a dedicated sales booth in the Panda Marketplace, with all proceeds going to the Red Cross. Featured at the booth will be "You Name the Price," a sale of items donated by members of MCCC, OCA-Wisconsin, and numerous Chinese student groups, as well as other local Chinese-Americans.

Mooncakes & More

For Moon Festival Weekend, family recipes of MCCC members will yield two authentic specialties. Decadent homemade mooncakes with rich fillings of lotus paste or red bean paste will be something to celebrate. The taste delights are best when shared with family. Chinese lamb skewers, not available at local restaurants, are also a treat. Skewers have alternating cubes of lean meat and fat, making them succulent and flavorful. Both items will be available for purchase at the MCCC booth in the Shrub Mall.

China Lights food vendors will continue to offer a variety of Asian and Western food options from Kowloon Chicken to hot dogs. The vendors, in concessions areas near the performance stages, are Tanpopo/Greenfish, Lychee Garden, Zilli Hospitality Group, Gift of Wings Grill, Wisconsin Fried Cheese Curds, and T. Best Kettle Corn Co. Beverage service in the concessions areas includes Tsingtao (a lager from China), original Ozeki Sake, domestic and premium tap beers, and wine. Non-alcoholic bottled beverages are also available.

Offering a cozy area with bistro tables, Ralph's Wine & Sake bar serves beverages only—four styles of wine, Ozeki's flavored and sparkling sake, craft sodas including Sprecher's Lychee and Asian Pear, coffee, hot chocolate, and hot tea.

Lucky-Money Lanterns & Cultural Programs

Through programs by OCA-Wisconsin members, visitors will make paper lanterns, will learn about the history of lanterns and the folklore of the moon, and may take part in a tea ceremony. All programs take place in the Garden House, Friday through Sunday.

Using Hong Bao, or lucky-money envelopes, participants will make a lantern filled with good luck to take home. Lantern workshops will be offered from 6–7:30 p.m.

Following the lantern making, from 7:45–8:15 p.m., guests will hear stories of the legendary Bao Gong, a magistrate of the Song Dynasty, who solved petty crimes and palace intrigues.

Closing the evening at the Garden House, from 8:30–9:30 p.m., a presentation on tea cultures from around the world will include the opportunity for 10 audience members to participate in a Gonfu Tea, or tea ceremony. The lucky guests will taste fine oolong and green tea, courtesy of Rishi Tea of Milwaukee.

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Also in the Garden House is a display of traditional Asian clothing. For a photo op, visitors are invited to try on additional small-sized clothing items.

Added Stage Performances

Kicking off the entertainment, the Illumination Parade will proceed through the audience at the Dragon Stage at 6:15 p.m. and will conclude in time for the first performance of the night.

Friday through Sunday, six shows will be presented by the professional performers from China, and an additional two shows will be presented by members of the local Asian-American community. Performances begin at about 6:30 p.m. and are staggered between the Dragon and Panda stages. The night's schedule is posted at the Welcome Gate.

Local talent will take the stage to demonstrate Chinese yo-yo and traditional dance, and to give a quipo fashion show, featuring the classic, form-fitting silk dress. Traditional dances being performed include Dancing Butterflies, a solo dance illustrating a girl playing with butterflies; Jasmine Flower, where hand fans evoke the image of the fragrant flower; Umbrella Dance, featuring painted silk parasols; and Yangko, complete with waving handkerchiefs to send good luck.

The professional acrobats, martial artists, and musicians from China will offer a full range of entertainment. Some of the acrobatic feats, such as plate spinning or catching bowls on a unicycle require calm conditions. If winds are too strong, other professional acts will go on. One example is face changing, an ancient Chinese art form from the Sichuan opera. Performers wear thin masks that change with the passing of a fan. Another example is the demonstration of baji, a kind of tai chi that features explosive, short-range strikes. In addition, traditional Chinese folk music will be performed on the erhu, or two-stringed Chinese violin. The instrument, which is played vertically and has free-floating strings, is said to imitate the sound of thousands of horses running on the grassland.

Lantern Displays

Of course, the lantern displays are the star of the show. Even before reaching the Welcome Gate, visitors have been impressed by the Porcelain Tower. Here, the intricate work of Chinese artisans brought together 60,000 porcelain bowls, bottles, cups, plates, and spoons to create the nearly 40-foot-tall structure.

When inside the exhibition, visitors often find that each display is more magical than the last. Glowing flowers, swans, fish, and pandas emerge from garden spaces. Most dramatic are the 200-foot dragon and an accompanying phoenix with a long undulating tail.

To power one of the displays, youths can lend a hand—or, more precisely, their feet. In the Perennial Garden, a bicycle is connected to an elephant lantern, known by staff as “pedal the pachyderm.” Visitors can hop on the bike and pedal to illuminate the elephant.

One of the many displays providing visitors a photo op is the Love Gallery, an archway formed by a series of heart shapes. The display may turn out to be this fall's most popular location to “pop the question.”

The Chinese Marketplace

In the colorful marketplace, Chinese artisans create traditional handicrafts. Some of the crafts being demonstrated include name painting, rice engraving, inner-bottle painting, and aluminum weaving.

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Name painting combines calligraphy with vivid imagery to create a work of art. Rice engraving requires a microscope and a steady hand to carve a Chinese poem, a person's name, or special wishes on a grain of rice. When complete, the tiny artwork is preserved in oil in a synthetic crystal capsule. Inner-bottle painting, also known as painting snuff bottles, uses a bent brush to paint figures inside a bottle, leaving the artwork protected. In aluminum weaving, thin metal wires are formed into ornaments representing flowers, dragons, and even motorcycles. The marketplace is more than a place to shop; it's a cultural experience.

Admission/Fees

China Lights admission tickets are valid any night of the regular 2017 schedule. Admission is \$15 for adults (age 18–59) and \$10 for seniors (age 60 and up) and children (age 5-17). Children under age 5 are admitted free. For \$30, a patron may purchase a one-visit VIP ticket, which includes early admission at 5 p.m., the mobile guide, a collectible Chinese hand fan which serves as the admission ticket to a private tour at 5:15 p.m., and optional participation in the Illumination Parade. Offered exclusively at the Botanical Gardens is a season pass, which allows one adult repeat visits for \$45. Free parking is included with all admission tickets.

A mobile guide, which requires a cell phone for use, provides background information on the displays. The guide is available for \$5 on-site.

Tickets may be purchased in advance on-line at chinalights.org, Boerner Botanical Gardens, and the following Milwaukee County Parks point-of-sale locations: Milwaukee County Parks Headquarters Public Services Office (9480 Watertown Plank Road), Mitchell Park Domes (524 S. Layton Blvd.), Brown Deer Park Golf Course (7625 N. Range Line Road), Currie Golf Course (3535 N. Mayfair Road), Dretzka Golf Course (12020 W. Bradley Road), Grant Golf Course (100 E. Hawthorne Ave.), Greenfield Golf Course (12035 W. Greenfield Ave.), Hansen Golf Course (9800 W. Underwood Creek Parkway), Lincoln Park Golf Course (1000 W. Hampton Ave.), Oakwood Golf Course (3600 W. Oakwood Road), Warnimont Golf Course (5400 S. Lake Drive), and Whitnall Golf Course (6751 S. 92nd St.).

Expedited night-time ticket purchases are available on-site at the outdoor ticket office.

While the displays are magical at night, they are beautiful during the day. Displays may be viewed unlit during the day for the cost of regular Botanical Gardens admission. Patrons may re-enter the Botanical Gardens for China Lights that same day by presenting their daily admission wristband and paying an additional \$10.

Free Parking & Shuttle Service

Free parking is included with all tickets, and free shuttle service is provided from outer lots to the entrance. Before entering Whitnall Park, visitors will see notifications of parking lot availability. As the nine lighted lots near capacity, signage will indicate temporary lot closures. As parking spaces become available, the lots will reopen and signage will be updated. Signage on the eastern side of the park is located at three 92nd Street intersections, at Rawson, College, and Forest Home avenues. Signage on the western side of the park is located at three Whitnall Park Drive intersections, at College Avenue, 108th Street (Hwy 100), and Lilac Lane. Accessible close-up paved parking nearest the China Lights entrance is available on a first-come, first-served basis to people with disabilities who have state-issued disabled parking or disabled Veteran parking license plates, or the state-issued disabled parking identification card. Drop-off areas are available for Uber and taxis. Motorcoach parking must be reserved by calling 414-525-5603.

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China Lights is brought to Milwaukee through the partnership of the Milwaukee County Parks and The Park People of Milwaukee County, with support from Travel Wisconsin. The event is presented by Tri City National Bank and is sponsored by We Energies.

Upcoming Weekend Themes

Oct. 13–15, Cultural Weekend will focus on Chinese cultural arts with demonstrations, lectures, and videos, and Oct 20–22, Closing Weekend will feature giveaways and the closing ceremony.

For more information, visit chinalights.org.

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Background

In 2016, Milwaukee became the first Midwestern city to schedule the unequalled China Lights. Visitors from across the state, the Midwest, and beyond attended the show. At one point, demand for tickets to the show was so great that sales had to be suspended.

As part of China's five-year economic plan, in 2015 the Sichuan Provincial Department of Commerce developed a campaign with the goal of holding 100 lantern shows in 100 cities worldwide to spread Chinese traditional culture and promote cultural exchange. The custom of lighting lanterns has occurred for thousands of years, and Zigong City now boasts 380 lantern-making companies with 80,000 lantern artisans.