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For immediate release

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World-Class Chinese Lantern Festival Opening at Boerner Botanical Gardens, Sept. 21

MILWAUKEE (Sept. 14, 2018) — Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele announced today that the world-class Chinese lantern festival, China Lights: Panda-Mania, will open to the public Sept. 21 at Boerner Botanical Gardens.

As the sun goes down, the magical glow of 41 larger-than-life sculptural lantern displays will illuminate the renowned nine-acre Boerner Botanical Gardens, in Whitnall Park at 9400 Boerner Drive, Hales Corners, WI. The festival, presented by Tri City National Bank, will also celebrate Asian folk-culture with professional entertainment sponsored by We Energies, a bustling marketplace, and a wide variety of food and beverage selections. The event runs from Sept. 21–Oct. 21, 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 will be closed Mondays.

“This spectacular event continues to bring people together from across Milwaukee County and well beyond. Simply put, this is an awe-inspiring show that everyone must see,” Abele said.

Lantern Displays

Even before reaching the Welcome Gate, visitors will be introduced to one of several giant panda lantern displays. In front of the Education & Visitor Center, guests will be amazed to find that the display of a giant panda is constructed almost entirely of ping-pong balls—thousands of them. This display may be viewed free of charge.

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When inside the exhibition, visitors will traverse three quarters of a mile along one-way paths to see exhibits focused on Chinese culture, plants, and animals, with each display more magical than the last. Some displays will include animation. Sure to be the most-photographed displays are the 150-foot-long blue dragon and the companion phoenix. Meanwhile, staying true to the Panda-Mania theme, the festival boasts a plethora of panda lanterns in the panda habitat area. Here the playful pandas are involved in a variety of activities.

Another show highlight will be this year's interactive displays, designed with children in mind. One display is composed of a series of discs that, when stepped upon, light up to create an illuminated path. Another display features suspended moons that can be used as swings. A rest area accommodating 20 people will be located nearby.

Event-goers will also have the opportunity to see the inner workings of a lantern. Patrons will walk through the "belly" of the Shark Tunnel, where sheer fabric reveals the metal framework and LED lights. To learn more about the construction of the displays, visitors can watch a video in the Reiman Cultural Building.

Weekend Themes

Special weekend themes will be the following:

- Sept. 21–23, Opening Weekend
- Sept. 28–30, Asian Cuisine Weekend, sponsored by MillerCoors
- Oct. 5–7, Moon Festival Weekend, presented by the Milwaukee Chinese Community Center and OCA–Wisconsin
- Oct. 12–14, Cultural Weekend, sponsored by the Reiman Foundation
- Oct 19–21, Closing Weekend

Cultural Entertainment

Each night at about 6:15 p.m., entertainment staff, dressed as a lion, will lead a procession through the audience at the Dragon Stage, the main stage. The parade will conclude in time for the first performance of the night.

Stage performances will highlight folk arts and culture, with professional acrobats, martial artists, and dancers from China. Entertainment will vary nightly. Performances will be staggered between the Dragon and Panda stages beginning at about 6:30 p.m. During the week, four shows will be offered each night; Friday through Sunday, six shows. The night's schedule will be posted at the Welcome Gate.

Acrobatic acts include foot juggling, plate spinning, diabolo (Chinese yo-yo), contortion, and mask changing. Mask changing is an ancient Chinese art form from the Sichuan opera. Performers wear multiple thin masks which they change with the passing of a hand fan.

The martial art of baji quan, a kind of tai chi that features explosive, short-range strikes, will be demonstrated by two practitioners who have won numerous competitions, including the World Taijiquan Championships.

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Folk dances to traditional music will be performed by dancers with formal dance educations and awards from national competitions. The dancers will wear costumes reflecting the region associated with the dance.

Cultural Displays

The Reiman Cultural Building will be the center for cultural displays. Examples of traditional Asian clothing will be on display. Additional small-sized clothing items will be available for visitors to try on for a photo op. Streaming videos will highlight the making of the show, China's tourism, and traditional arts.

The Chinese Marketplace

In the colorful marketplace, visitors will find an abundance of souvenir items as well as the opportunity to watch Chinese artisans create traditional handicrafts, which are also for sale. Some of the crafts being demonstrated include inner-bottle painting, rock engraving, and Suzhou embroidery/needle painting. Inner-bottle painting, also known as painting snuff bottles, involves using a bent brush to paint figures inside a small, clear bottle, leaving the artwork protected. The marketplace is more than a place to shop; it's a cultural experience.

Food & Beverage Service

Throughout the festival a wide variety of Asian and Western food options will be available, from Mongolian Beef to hot dogs. Vendors at this year's event include MIL-WOK-EE, Gift of Wings Grill, Heavenly Roasted Nuts, T. Best Kettle Corn Co., Tanpopo/Greenfish, Wisconsin Fried Cheese Curds, and Zilli Hospitality Group. Beverages available will range from Tsingtao beer and Ozeki Sake to domestic and premium tap beers and sodas. Hot beverages will also be available. Vendors will service two concessions areas—both with picnic table seating.

Complimentary Parking & Shuttle Service

Electronic boards will surround Whitnall Park, providing parking information in real time, and Park Rangers will direct traffic through the park to the parking lots. E-boards on the eastern side of the park will be located at three 92nd Street intersections—at Rawson, College, and Forest Home avenues. Signage on the western side of the park will be located at the intersections of Whitnall Park Drive at Lilac Lane, and College Avenue at Nature Center Drive. Complimentary parking will be available in 10 fully lighted lots on a first-come, first-served basis. If a lot is full, it will reopen as spaces become available. Complimentary shuttles will be dispatched to serve event-goers parked at the four outer lots. The shuttle service will also include an audio introduction to the show.

Preferred close-up paved parking nearest the China Lights entrance will be available on a complimentary, 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.

Designated drop-off areas for authorized taxis/uber and motorcoaches will also be located near the China Lights entrance. Motorcoach operators must make advance arrangements.

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Admission/Fees

China Lights admission tickets will be valid any night of the regular 2018 schedule. Ticket prices are the following: Child, age 5-17, \$12; Adult, age 18-59, \$20; Senior, age 60+, \$12; one-visit individual VIP package, \$30; and unlimited-visit individual Season Pass, \$50. The VIP package includes early entry (5 p.m.), a collectible premium, a tour (5:15 p.m.), participation in the Illumination Parade (6:15 p.m.), VIP seating at the first show of the night, and the mobile guide. The mobile guide, which requires a cell phone for use, provides a cultural perspective on the displays. The guide is also available for \$5 on-site.

E-Tickets, which include priority access at the Welcome Gate, may be purchased in advance on-line at chinalights.org. The e-ticket can be scanned from a print copy or directly from a phone.

Tickets may also be purchased in person at Boerner Botanical Gardens, Milwaukee County Parks Public Services Office (9480 Watertown Plank Road), Mitchell Park Domes (524 S. Layton Blvd.), and golf courses at Brown Deer Park (7625 N. Range Line Road), Currie Park (3535 N. Mayfair Road), Dretzka Park (12020 W. Bradley Road), Grant Park (100 E. Hawthorne Ave.), Greenfield Park (12035 W. Greenfield Ave.), Hansen Park (9800 W. Underwood Creek Parkway), Lincoln Park (1000 W. Hampton Ave.), Oakwood Park (3600 W. Oakwood Road), Warnimont Park (5400 S. Lake Drive), and Whitnall Park (6751 S. 92nd St.).

Same-night tickets will be available on-site at the outdoor ticket office starting at 4 p.m.

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, after 5:30 p.m., by presenting their daily admission wristband and paying an additional \$10.

For more information, call 888-733-1888 or visit chinalights.org.

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BACKGROUND

For the past three years, Festival Pro LLC, a Milwaukee-based special-events producer, worked with the Sichuan Tianyu Arts & Culture, Inc., in cooperation with Zigong City and the Sichuan Provincial Department of Commerce, to bring the China Lights lantern festival to Milwaukee

In 2016, Milwaukee became the first Midwestern city to host the unequalled China Lights. In each of the past two years, more than 100,000 visitors attended the show.

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. According to the Zigong Lantern Culture & Industry Group, Zigong City now boasts nearly 600 registered lantern-making companies with 40,000 employees.