



Contact: Shirley Walczak, Director, Boerner Botanical Gardens
414-525-5603
Shirley.Walczak@MilwaukeeCountyWI.gov

For immediate release

Julie Stolper Dieckelman, Public Relations/Marketing Consultant
262-853-1602
jbsdllc@gmail.com

World-Class Chinese Lantern Festival Features Asian Cuisine Weekend at Boerner Botanical Gardens, Sept. 28–30

MILWAUKEE (Sept. 24, 2018) — Asian-inspired cuisine will tempt visitors at this weekend's China Lights: Panda-Mania lantern festival at Boerner Botanical Gardens. Asian Cuisine Weekend, sponsored by MillerCoors, also gives event-goers the opportunity to participate in food contests.

Each night as the sun goes down, the magical glow of 41 larger-than-life sculptural lantern displays 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, also celebrates 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 through 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 is closed Mondays.

Asian Cuisine Weekend

From Mongolia to Milwaukee, a variety of Asian and Western regions are represented in the food options available at China Lights. Highlights include Albert Yee MIL-WOK-EE's Gluten-free Spicy Singapore Noodles (\$8), Tanpopo/Greenfish's Bulgogi Korean Beef Bowl with Egg Roll (\$12), and Zilli Hospitality Group's Crab Rangoon (four for \$6). The Gift of Wings Grill sells a variety of Western items, from the Klement's brat to Milwaukee Pretzel Company's Bavarian Pretzel with Cheese (\$5). Additional selections are provided by Heavenly Roasted Nuts, T. Best Kettle Corn Co., and Wisconsin Fried Cheese Curds. Food service is available in two concessions areas, both with picnic table seating near the performance stages.

Both concessions areas also offer beverage service ranging from Tsingtao beer and original Ozeki Sake to domestic and premium tap beers and sodas.

Ralph's Wine & Sake bar, a cozy area with bistro tables, serves beverages only. In addition to serving four styles of wine, the bar offers Ozeki's flavored jelly and sparkling sakes, Sprecher's craft sodas (Lemon Grass, Lychee and Asian Pear), and hot beverages.

Asian Cuisine Weekend's Egg Roll & Dumpling Eating Contests

People who like to make eating a competition are invited to take part in the Egg Roll Eating Contest or the Dumpling Eating Contest on Saturday and Sunday at 6:50 p.m. Signup begins at 6:30 p.m. at the Dragon Stage. The competitions are limited to the first eight people who sign up each night. The winner is the person who eats the most egg rolls or dumplings in 88 seconds or who finishes eating eight egg rolls, whichever comes first. There is no fee to enter the contests. All participants will receive the China Lights souvenir lantern (as well as their untouched egg rolls or dumplings to share with friends or family). The first-place winner will also take home a China Lights t-shirt and sweatshirt. Contest rules will be posted.

Lantern Displays

Of course, the stars of the festival are the lantern displays.

Even before reaching the Welcome Gate, visitors encounter one of several giant panda lantern displays. In front of the Education & Visitor Center, guests are 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.

When inside the exhibition, visitors 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 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 are 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 is located nearby.

Event-goers also have the opportunity to see the inner workings of a lantern. Patrons 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.

Cultural Entertainment

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

Stage performances highlight folk arts and culture, with professional acrobats, martial artists, and dancers from China. Entertainment varies nightly. Performances are staggered between the Dragon and Panda stages beginning at about 6:30 p.m. During the week, four shows are offered each night; Friday through Sunday, six shows. The night's schedule is 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, is demonstrated by two practitioners who have won numerous competitions, including the World Taijiquan Championships.

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

Cultural Displays

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

The Chinese Marketplace

In the colorful marketplace, visitors 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 with a bent brush, rock engraving, and Suzhou embroidery/needle painting. The marketplace is more than a place to shop; it's a cultural experience.

Weekend Themes

Upcoming weekend themes are the following:

- 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

Complimentary Parking & Shuttle Service

Electronic boards surround Whitnall Park, providing parking information in real time, and Park Rangers direct traffic through the park to the parking lots. E-boards on the eastern side of the park are located at three 92nd Street intersections—at Rawson, College, and Forest Home avenues. Signage on the western side of the park is located at the intersections of Whitnall Park Drive at Lilac Lane, and College Avenue at Nature Center Drive. Complimentary parking is 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 are dispatched to serve event-goers parked at the four outer lots. The shuttle service includes an audio introduction to the show.

Preferred close-up paved parking nearest the China Lights entrance is 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 is also located near the China Lights entrance. Motorcoach operators must make advance arrangements.

Admission/Fees

China Lights admission tickets are 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 are 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.

###

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.