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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CHINA LIGHTS READY TO SHINE WITH HELP FROM TOURISM GRANT**

*Grant funds will go toward marketing month-long exhibition*

**MILWAUKEE, Wis. (Aug. 8, 2016)** – Visitors are invited to celebrate the art, light and culture of China at the inaugural China Lights exhibit with help from a \$39,550 Joint Effort Marketing (JEM) grant from the Department of Tourism. Taking place Oct. 1-30 at Boerner Botanical Gardens, China Lights features 40 displays with over 1,000 sculptural components created on-site by Chinese artisans. The month-long exhibit also features nightly stage performances highlighting various Chinese entertainment, cultural displays and video presentations, and Asian and American food offerings.

“We are excited to support this new exhibition that spotlights the cultural traditions of China right here in Wisconsin,” said Tourism Secretary Stephanie Klett. “China Lights is an exceptionally unique event, and since Milwaukee is the first Midwest stop, we expect it to draw people from a large radius, generating a significant positive economic impact from hotel stays and visitor spending.”

In 2015, the tourism economy in Wisconsin totaled \$19.3 billion, a more than four percent increase from 2014. Tourism supported 190,717 jobs in Wisconsin’s labor market in 2015. Since 2010, tourism activity in the state added 18,717 jobs to the economy, an 11% increase in employment opportunities for Wisconsin residents. Visitors generated \$1.5 billion in state and local revenue. Wisconsin taxpayers would need to pay \$640 per household in order to maintain current government services.

Part of a traveling exhibition, China Lights is modeled after traditional Chinese lantern festivals celebrating the end of the Lunar New Year. Milwaukee will be one of only seven stops on the 2016 American tour and the first in the Midwest. Grant funds will go towards online, broadcast, print and outdoor advertising.

Event organizers look to draw 50,000 attendees for an estimated economic impact of \$824,000. Total business sales in Milwaukee County reached more than \$3.3 billion in 2015, supporting 31,300 jobs and \$223.6 million in state and local taxes.

“What would normally be our slowest time of the garden season will now be our busiest,” said Shirley Walczak, Director of Boerner Botanical Gardens. “A big thank you goes out to our China Lights co-presenter, the Park People of Milwaukee County, for securing the JEM grant to afford us the opportunity to make China Lights a truly regional event.”

In fiscal 2016, the Department funded 57 JEM projects, awarding a total of more than \$1.1 million. Visitor expenditures driven by the marketing from these projects will exceed \$31 million. JEM grant funds are available to non-profit organizations for the promotion of Wisconsin tourism events and destinations. The state can fund up to 75 percent of a project's first-year advertising and marketing costs, and provide support for second- and third-year projects with decreasing amounts for funding until projects become self-sustaining. For information on the JEM Program and application materials, visit <http://industry.travelwisconsin.com>.

The mission of the Wisconsin Department of Tourism is to market the State as the Midwest's premier travel destination for fun by executing industry-leading marketing programs and establishing strategic partnerships. The Department plays a significant role in generating greater economic impact and jobs for Wisconsin. The portal for traveler information can be found at: [www.travelwisconsin.com](http://www.travelwisconsin.com).

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