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For immediate release

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Local Asian-American Community Hosts Moon Festival Weekend at China Lights at Boerner Botanical Gardens, Oct. 5-7

MILWAUKEE (Oct. 2, 2018) — Milwaukee's Asian-American Community will bring special-recipe Bubble Tea and a variety of family traditions to this weekend's China Lights: Panda-Mania lantern festival at Boerner Botanical Gardens. Moon Festival Weekend, is hosted by the Milwaukee Chinese Community Center and OCA-Wisconsin.

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.

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 dining with family, appreciating the moon, and making lanterns. And all can be done during the China Lights Moon Festival Weekend.

Bubble Tea, Chinese Lamb Skewers, & More

For Moon Festival Weekend, family recipes of MCCC members will yield two authentic specialties—Bubble Tea and Chinese lamb skewers. Bubble tea is a tea-based beverage with tapioca balls mixed in for a special chewy texture. The tea will be available for purchase at the MCCC booth near the Dragon Stage. Chinese lamb skewers, not available at local restaurants, feature alternating cubes of lean meat and fat, making them succulent and flavorful. The skewers will be available for purchase at the MCCC booth near the Panda Stage.

In addition, a wide variety of Asian and Western food options are available, from the Bulgogi Korean Beef Bowl to bratwurst. 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 range from Tsingtao beer and original Ozeki Sake to domestic and premium tap beers and sodas. Vendors service two concessions areas, both with picnic-table seating near the performance stages.

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.

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.

Closing the evening at the Garden House, from 8–9 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.

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 by the Milwaukee Chinese Community Center Performance Troupe

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 acrobats, martial artists, and dancers from China, and an additional two shows will be presented by the Milwaukee Chinese Community Center Performance Troupe. 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.

Professional acts include foot juggling, plate spinning, Chinese yo-yo, contortion, baji quan (a kind of explosive tai chi), folk dance, and mask changing (the ancient art form from the Sichuan opera where performers wear multiple thin masks which they change with the passing of a hand fan).

Local talent will take the stage to demonstrate Chinese yo-yo and traditional folk dances, and to perform in a musical ensemble featuring the pipa, a traditional Chinese instrument. Traditional dances include Tibet dance, performed with long scarf sleeves; Cute Girls, or Dance of the Yi People, performed in beautiful long skirts; and a solo dance. In addition, local youths will perform a modern dance inspired by the music of ancient China.

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 thousands of ping-pong balls. 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.

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. 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.

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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.