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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.

## Chinese Lantern Festival Opening at Boerner Botanical Gardens, Sept. 22

MILWAUKEE (Sept. 14, 2017) — Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele announced today that the world-class Chinese lantern festival, China Lights: The Magic Returns, will open to the public Sept. 22 at Boerner Botanical Gardens.

As the sun goes down, the magical glow of nearly 50 larger-than-life sculptural displays will illuminate 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 from Sept. 22–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 will be closed Mondays.

Boerner Botanical Gardens will be transformed into a dramatic display of color, light, and sound.

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## **Lantern Displays**

Even before reaching the Welcome Gate, visitors will be impressed by the first display, the Porcelain Tower. Those who take a closer look will be amazed by the intricate work of the Chinese artisans who brought together 60,000 porcelain bowls, bottles, cups, plates, and spoons to create the nearly 40-foot-tall structure.

When inside the exhibition, visitors may find that each display is more magical than the last. For about a month, 24 artisans from China have been on-site welding metal frames, lighting the frames from within using various types and colors of LED lights, covering the framework in brightly colored fabric, and hand-painting finishing touches. Among the components emerging from the process are a 200-foot dragon, a phoenix with a long undulating tail, glowing flowers, swans, fish, and pandas.

Youths can lend a hand—or, more precisely, their feet—to power one of the displays. 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.

Sure to provide 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.”

Throughout the exhibition, one-way traffic flows are being implemented. On-site signage will indicate routes through the display areas.

## **Cultural Entertainment**

Each night at about 6:15 p.m. members of the entertainment staff will lead the Illumination Parade, a procession through the displays in the Shrub Mall. During the Opening Weekend, free giveaways will be distributed. The parade will conclude at the Dragon Stage, the main stage, in time for the first performance of the night.

Two stages will highlight folk-culture entertainment. In addition to the Dragon Stage, the smaller, more intimate Panda Stage will offer professional acts. Performances will be staggered between the 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.

Acrobats, martial artists, and musicians will be among the performers. Some of the acrobatic feats, such as plate spinning, catching bowls on a unicycle, or performing tricks with the Chinese yo-yo, require calm conditions. If winds are too strong, other of the many professional acts will go on. One example is face changing, or mask changing, the ancient Chinese art form from the Sichuan opera. Performers wear thin masks that change with the passing of a fan. Another performance to see is the demonstration of baji, a kind of tai chi that features explosive, short-range strikes. The two martial artists demonstrating the form have placed first and third in some of China’s national competitions. 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.

## **Cultural Displays**

For China Lights, the Garden House 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. Also on view in the Garden House will be videos highlighting the making of the Porcelain Tower display, China’s natural beauty, history, and culture.

### **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. Clothing, toys, jewelry, and artwork will be for sale. Some of the crafts being demonstrated include name painting, rice engraving, inner-bottle painting, and aluminum weaving. 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, involves using 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 is a cultural experience.

### **Food & Beverage Service**

Throughout the festival a wide variety of Asian and Western food options will be available, from Kowloon Chicken to hot dogs—or the fusion of cultures in the Blueberry Pie Egg Roll. Vendors include Tanpopo/Greenfish, Lychee Garden, Zilli Hospitality Group, Gift of Wings Grill, Wisconsin Fried Cheese Curds, and T. Best Kettle Corn Co. Food service will be available in two concessions areas, both with picnic table seating, one with a smaller more intimate atmosphere.

Beverages available will range from Tsingtao beer and Ozeki Sake to domestic and premium tap beers and sodas. In addition, a wine and coffee bar will offer flavored and sparkling sake, craft sodas including Sprecher's Lychee and Asian Pear, coffee, hot chocolate, and hot tea.

### **Admission/Fees**

China Lights admission tickets will be 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 will be 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 will be 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, will provide background information on the displays. The guide is available for \$5 on-site.

Tickets may be purchased in advance on-line at [chinalights.org](http://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 will be 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 China Lights entrance. Before entering Whitnall Park, visitors to China Lights 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 the signage will be updated. Signage on the eastern side of the park will be located at three 92<sup>nd</sup> Street intersections, at Rawson, College, and Forest Home avenues. Signage on the western side of the park will be located at three Whitnall Park Drive intersections, at College Avenue, 108<sup>th</sup> Street (Hwy 100), and Lilac Lane. Accessible close-up paved parking nearest the China Lights entrance will be 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.

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**

- Sept. 29–Oct 1, Asian Cuisine/Chicago Weekend will offer contests, and food specials, as well as a free premium to the first 3,000 visitors presenting an Illinois driver's license.
- Oct. 6–8, Moon Festival Weekend, presented by the Milwaukee Chinese Community Center and OCA–Wisconsin, will feature demonstrations of Chinese folk arts.
- Oct. 13–15, Cultural Weekend will focus on Chinese cultural arts with demonstrations, lectures, and videos.
- Oct 20–22, Closing Weekend will feature giveaways and the closing ceremony.

For more information, visit [chinalights.org](http://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.