Chicago readies Lunar New Year festivities

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By Jian Pingfor China Daily in Chicago |   
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Half a dozen organizations in Chicago held an event on Wednesday to announce programs from Feb 16 to March 4 to celebrate the upcoming Year of the Dog.  
"In all of America, Chicago is the only city which has launched this kind of citywide celebration of the Chinese New Year," said Hong Lei, China's consul general in Chicago.  
Hong thanked the mayor of Chicago for his efforts in "deepening the understanding between the people of China and the people of Chicago" through cultural programs and all the organizations that have collaborated to plan the events and performances.  
This is the fifth year of citywide Chinese New Year celebrations.  
Special performances include a concert at the Chicago Symphony Center on Feb 17, featuring the Chongqing Chuanju Opera Theatre and the Zhejiang Symphony Orchestra.  
The concert will "showcase traditional Sichuan opera, exquisite singing, face mask changing, fire breathing, and amazing acrobats for the first half," said James M. Fahey, director of programming at the center.  
The second half will "spotlight traditional Chinese instruments" that incorporate traditional and regional folk music of Zhejiang province, Fahey added.  
"Chinese New Year festivities are among the highlights of Chicago's arts and culture calendar every year," said Choose Chicago president and CEO David Whitaker.  
Whitaker said that Chicago welcomed more than 224,000 Chinese visitors to the city last year, an increase of 40 percent over the previous year.  
"Celebrating the lunar New Year is truly a citywide event in Chicago," said Chicago Deputy Mayor Bob Rivkin. "Chinese culture is woven into the fabric of Chicago. It's a culture that we honor and cherish."  
The Art Institute of Chicago will open its highly anticipated exhibition "Mirroring China's Past: Emperors and Their Bronzes" in conjunction with the Chinese New Year celebration on Feb 25. It will display more than 170 bronze pieces from collections in China and several US museums.  
The show will be exhibited only in Chicago, said Tao Wang, Pritzker Chair of Asian Art at the institute, who called the exhibition a "once-in-a-lifetime" event.  
At Chicago's Navy Pier, three stages will be set up for Chinese New Year performances on Feb 24, and the Chicago Cultural Center will feature performances on Feb 16 and 25.  
Two Chinese New Year parades will be held as well, one on Feb 24 in Chinatown and the other on Feb 25 uptown in the Argyle Street area.  
New to participate in this year's celebration is the Chicago Bulls. On Feb 22, the Bulls will present Chinese New Year themed pre-game and on-court entertainment in partnership with the Chicago Huaxing Arts Group during a game against the Philadelphia 76ers at the United Center.  
"The Chicago Bulls have 175 million active fans," said Will Syring, a senior manager with the Bulls.  
According one survey conducted by the Bulls, 65 million of those fans are in China, Syring said, representing "our largest volume by a landslide".  
"We are very excited to celebrate Chinese New Year and be a part of this cultural celebration for the first time," Syring added.

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