



Date: June 29, 2009

**EAST MEETS MIDWEST AT THE 2009 JAPANESE FESTIVAL
AT THE MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN**
Annual Matsuri (Festival) Returns to St. Louis Labor Day Weekend

- WHAT:** 2009 Japanese Festival
WHEN: Labor Day weekend; Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 5 and 6 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.;
Monday, Sept. 7 (Labor Day) from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
WHERE: Missouri Botanical Garden, 4344 Shaw Blvd. in St. Louis, Mo.
COST: \$15 adults, \$10 seniors (ages 65 and over), \$5 children (ages three to 12).
\$5 Missouri Botanical Garden members; members' children (ages 12 and under) free.
SPONSORS: Novus International, Inc.
INFO: www.mobot.org; (314) 577-9400, 1 (800) 642-8842 toll free

(ST. LOUIS): Thunderous *taiko* beats, super-sized *sumo* bouts, meticulously-manicured *bonsai* trees, traditional *kimono* fashions and masterful *bunraku* puppetry: the sights, sounds and culture of the Far East pervade the Midwest at the annual **Japanese Festival**, held Labor Day weekend at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis.

Seiwa-en, the “garden of pure, clear harmony and peace” and one of the largest authentic Japanese strolling gardens in North America, takes center stage for the weekend’s festivities. A boisterous opening ceremony kicks off the celebration Saturday morning at the Japanese Garden entrance with an elaborate *omikoshi* Shinto shrine parade, *bon odori* festival dancing, *taiko* drumming and remarks by local and visiting dignitaries. Throughout the day, enjoy guided tours of the 14-acre Japanese Garden, or take an enchanting evening stroll by candlelight.

Visiting performers include returning *sumotori* (*sumo* wrestlers) Koryu and Sunahama, Hawaiian island natives who retired from professional wrestling in Japan after achieving high rank.

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ADD ONE: Japanese Festival

New in 2009, they are joined by a third *sumotori* from the islands: Kamikiwa. Although they weigh in at an intimidating 1,100-plus combined pounds, these giants are truly gentle, inviting audience participation from young and old alike who wish to learn about the training, fighting techniques and lifestyle of Japan's ancient warriors.

Also new to the Japanese Festival stage is *bunraku*, a form of traditional Japanese puppet theater, presented by the University of Missouri-Columbia Bunraku Bay Puppet Troupe. The term *bunraku* is derived from the legendary puppeteer from the 19th century, Uemura Bunrakuken, but the performance art actually originated decades earlier. It takes years to master. Detailed, four-foot-tall wooden puppets come to life as they act out dramas, aided by a system of rods, levers, and a team of three puppeteers called the *ningyo-zukai* who operate the puppet's arms, legs, head, eyes, mouth and eyebrows. Unlike the Western art form, *ningyo-zukai* are visible to the audience, dressed in black cotton robes and sliding around the stage with puppets in tow. The troupe will perform each day inside the Shoenberg Theater; limited seating is available first-come, first-served.

Returning favorites include the St. Louis Osuwa Taiko group, sounding the formidable drums that in years past were used by the Japanese to fool invading armies and mark village boundaries. Masaji Terasawa, otherwise known as the "Candyman," returns to delight onlookers with his unique style of street magic and sugary-spun creations.

Witness demonstrations of martial arts including *aikido*, *judo*, *karate*, *kendo* and *koryu bugei*. Watch sculptor Naomi Hamamura demonstrate one of Japan's popular winter art forms as he quickly chisels a bird or other figure from an oversized block of ice. Enjoy *ikebana* flower arrangements and learn the proper techniques of *bonsai*. Take in a traditional *kimono* fashion show and *Tozan Ryu*, or performances of classical dance partnered with popular music. Families will enjoy honing their *origami* paper folding skills, playing traditional Japanese games, and marveling at the *Koma-Mawashi* (top spinning) skills of Dr. Hiroshi Tada.

Shop for souvenirs and other Asian-inspired merchandise at the Japanese marketplace and the Garden Gate Shop. Sample Japanese cuisine, including *sushi*, *yakisoba* noodles, pancake-like *okonomiyaki*, juicy beef kabobs and red bean ice cream at the food court.

Support for the 2009 Japanese Festival is provided by Novus International, Inc.

Japanese Festival hours are Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 5 and 6 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. (doors open at 9 a.m. and remain open until 10 p.m. for evening candlelight walks), and Monday, Sept. 7 (Labor Day) from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$15 for adults, \$10 for seniors ages 65 and over, and \$5 for children ages three to 12. Missouri Botanical Garden members are \$5.

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ADD TWO: Japanese Festival

The Missouri Botanical Garden is located at 4344 Shaw Blvd. in south St. Louis, easily accessible from Interstate 44 at the Vandeventer exit. Free parking is available on-site and at two blocks west at the corner of Shaw and Vandeventer.

For more information, visit www.mobot.org or call the recorded event line at (314) 577-9400 or toll-free 1 (800) 642-8842.

The Missouri Botanical Garden is the oldest continually operating botanical garden in the nation, celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2009. *Missouri Botanical Garden: Green for 150 Years*.

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NOTE: Digital color images are available by request. Download media materials at www.mobot.org/press.

The Missouri Botanical Garden's mission is "to discover and share knowledge about plants and their environment, in order to preserve and enrich life." Today, 150 years after opening, the Missouri Botanical Garden is a National Historic Landmark and a center for science, conservation, education and horticultural display. *Missouri Botanical Garden: Green for 150 Years*.

The Missouri Botanical Garden is located at 4344 Shaw Blvd. in St. Louis, just south of I-44 at Vandeventer-Kingshighway (exit #287B). Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day except Dec. 25. Grounds open at 7 a.m. every Wednesday and Saturday. Admission is \$8; free children ages 12 and under and Garden members. St. Louis City and County residents are \$4 and free every Wednesday and Saturday until noon (exception: special admission rate events). Park for free on site and two blocks west at the Shaw-Vandeventer intersection. The Garden is easily accessible by taking the MetroLink commuter rail line to the Central West End station and picking up a Metro bus (www.metrostlouis.org). For general information, log on to www.mobot.org or call the 24-hour recording at (314) 577-9400 or 1-800-642-8842. For membership information, call (314) 577-5118 during weekday business hours. For volunteer opportunities, call (314) 577-5187 or visit www.mobot.org/volunteer. The Missouri Botanical Garden is a tobacco-free environment.

(Note: A section of the I-64/U.S. 40 highway is under construction through 2009. Before traveling, check www.thenewi64.org for updates or visit www.GetAroundStL.com for other helpful information.)