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FLAVOR OF THE MONTH: MIDSOMMAR FESTIVAL

CAN YOU NAME SWEDEN'S SECOND LARGEST CITY? HINT: YOU LIVE THERE

By Catherine Wargo

Chicago was once Sweden's second largest city. Who knew? One hundred years ago, the Swedish population in Chicago exceeded that of all Swedish cities except for Stockholm. Celebrate the city's Swedish heritage by having a Midsommar blow-out, just like the Swedes do each summer. One of the most celebrated Scandinavian holidays, Midsommar glorifies the longest day of the year; how fitting, given that the summer solstice is a pivotal day in the calendar year for the sun-worshipping Swedes. Join in on the fun at the 38th Annual Midsommar Festival, taking place at the Clark and Foster crossroads in Andersonville on June 14 and 15.

The festival, a fundraising event benefitting the Andersonville Chamber of Commerce, helps the Chamber support and strengthen the uniqueness and vitality of the Andersonville business community. As one of the few urban neighborhoods in Chicago where small businesses dominate and thrive, Andersonville is a rare and exceptional place — it's a diverse urban community with quaint cafes sitting next to an assortment of tempting international restaurants and specialty gift shops. A community that has long been home to waves of incoming Swedish immigrants, Andersonville holds a diverse population of Chicagoans looking for a friendly, cultural neighborhood. Settled by Swedes in the 1840s, Andersonville grew from a tranquil farming outpost to a bustling urban village. Today, even as the population continues to grow and change, Andersonville remains one of the most concentrated areas of Swedish culture in the United States.

This year, the Midsommarfest will likely attract around 35,000 people for an abundance of Swedish entertainment, a variety of international food and crafts, and, of course, Maypole dancing. "Midsommarfest is a great reflection of the diverse character of Andersonville," says Ellen Shepard, executive director of the Andersonville Chamber of Commerce. "We feature some of Chicago's best rock, folk, and jazz artists for the young, hip crowds, lots of wonderful kids' activities, and traditional Swedish festivities that pay homage to the history of the community."

"This tradition has been going on since the early 1950s," notes Matt Olaveson, president of the Swedish American Museum's Junior Board. "From the photos that I have seen of the festival in the early days, it hasn't changed much." This is the first year of the Junior Board's involvement in the festivities, and they aim to breathe some new life into the age-old tradition. This year's entertainment line-up includes Funkadesi, Cathy Richardson, the Waco Brothers, Underwater People, Anna Fernin's Trigger Gospel, Generations, Mr. Blatto, the Four Charms, Bumpus, and many more. Midsommarfest also offers an extraordinary selection of international eats. Whether you have a taste for Swedish meatballs, Pad Thai, hummus, or bratwurst, you will certainly find everything to fulfill your American "Swedish" experience.

The Swedish American Museum's Junior Board will host a Midsommarfest Party on June 20 at 7:30 p.m. The museum is located at 5211 N. Clark St. The Midsommar Festival takes place June 14-15 at the corner of Clark and Foster streets. A full schedule of events can be found at www.andersonville.org.