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For Immediate Release:

50th Birthday Bash for The Domes

Milwaukee, WI (May 13, 2015) Friends of The Domes invites the public to help the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory (aka The Domes) celebrate its first half-century, at the 50th Birthday Bash, Saturday, May 23, from 6–9 p.m. This architectural icon, described as “Milwaukee’s Living Landmark,” is located at 524 S. Layton Blvd.

Several local bakeries will offer samples of cake, cupcakes, and cookies for all to taste, and Cedar Crest will be dishing out the ice cream. Local dignitaries will preside over the official cake-cutting ceremony at 7 p.m., with the “Happy Birthday” song lead by members of the Bel Canto Senior Choir.

Participating bakeries include Miss Molly’s Pastries, Cake Lady, Classy Girl Cupcakes, Honey Pie, Mila’s European Bakery, Rich’s House of Cake, and Sugar and Flour.

With a 1960s retro theme, the celebration will present photo and video displays. Featured photos include construction of the “new” conservatory as well as the September 1965 ribbon-cutting dedication of the first dome by then First Lady, “Lady Bird” Johnson. Continuous showings of historic videos will be available in the Education Center and lobby. Visitors may view a video on the making of The Domes, see a recap of the past 50 years at The Domes, or watch a segment of I Remember, with host Jim Peck exploring the history and future of the Mitchell Park Domes with Architect Donald Grieb, Director Sandy Folaron, and Former Director Richard Risch.

Highlighting the entertainment for families with young children will be a magician and balloon twister, and the Retro Party Game Corner. Also, the Bel Canto choir will lead visitors in a sing-along of favorite songs of the past. Rounding out the children’s activities will be crafts and planting seeds to create a “flower power” pot to take home.

The original conservatory, designed by C. Koch and Company and built in 1898, displayed flowers in a “greenhouse” setting until it was demolished due to safety concerns in 1955. Wrought iron gates by renowned metal craftsman, Cyril Colnik, were saved from the facility and can be seen in the Show Dome today.

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In 1958 an architectural contest was conducted to determine the design for the new facility. Of 33 architects interviewed, Donald L. Grieb, a local architect, won the competition with a design for three bee-hive shaped—conoidal, not geodesic—domes. Each dome is 85 feet high and 140 feet wide, covering over 15,000 square feet. The unique design sheds dirt, snow, and ice and allows for maximum natural light.

In 1959 construction began. The concrete frame was precast on site. A “skin layer” of aluminum tubing and reinforced glass was placed over a temporary structure until it was self-supporting. Each dome is topped with a 3-ton, 37-foot-diameter cap. Grieb’s original design called for “halos” at the top of each dome, though this feature was not fully realized until the LED lighting renovation of 2008.

Openings for the three domes ranged from 1964-1967, with the Show Dome opening in December 1964 for a holiday display. Completion of the Tropical Dome was January 1966, and the Arid Dome opened in November 1967.

Admission for the 50th Birthday Bash fundraising event—including games, crafts, cake sampling, and ice cream—is \$5 per person. Children age 3 and under are admitted free of charge.

Craft cocktails popular in the 1960s and additional food and beverages items will be available for purchase from Zilli’s Hospitality Group.

For more information or to purchase advance tickets, visit milwaukeedomes.org.

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