

CELEBRATE SUMMER!

Best Festivals Around

By Mira Temkin

Welcome to summer -- time to get out there and enjoy the sunshine and warm breezes. From ethnic fairs to festivals, free concerts and art shows, Chicago really knows how to party. It's also a great time to create some very special memories with your family and start a few of your own yearly traditions. Here are some fun ways to share the joys of summer with your kids. So mark your calendar and make a ChicaGO of it!

JULY

Taste of Chicago through July 3, Grant Park

The granddaddy of them all is now in its 31st year. Bring your kids to enjoy a family-oriented celebration of local food and music. Admission is still free, and includes all activities and entertainment. Food tickets come in strips of 12 for \$8. Enjoy more than 300 different "tastes" with each of the 60 vendors also offering \$2 "Taste of" portions. If you want to avoid the lines, buy your tickets ahead of time at participating Dominick's locations. This year, four of the City's annual lakefront music festivals -- Viva Chicago, the Chicago Country Music Festival, Celtic Fest Chicago and the Chicago Gospel Music Festival -- will be incorporated into the Taste of Chicago, rather than stand-alone events. If you can, take public transportation. (877)CHICAGO, www.explorechicago.org

Where are Chicago's July 4 fireworks?

Celebrate our nation's independence at Navy Pier with a dazzling display of fireworks, choreographed to a patriotic soundtrack, starting at 9 p.m., www.navypier.com

Family Fun Festival at Millennium Park through August 21

Head to Millennium Park for fun and games! Every day between 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., kids can watch performances and participate in hands-on activities in the Family Fun Tent, located at the Chase

Promenade North. Events include Wiggleworms® at 10 a.m., when instructors from the Old Town School of Folk Music lead young children in a sing-along from the popular Wiggleworms program. A reading circle follows at 11 a.m., with kids' concerts by local and regional entertainers at 1 p.m. Throughout the day, hands-on craft projects and garden, science/environmental activities are led by some of the area's most renowned museums and cultural institutions, including Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago Children's Museum, Chicago History Museum, Museum of Science and Industry. Sponsored by Target and Chicago Office of Tourism and Culture. www.explorechicago.org

Stroller Tour of the Museum of Contemporary Art through December 31

What a grand way to introduce your little ones to the world of art as you stroll through current MCA Shows. The program is designed to be mindful of your young ones as you look at and talk about art with other adults. Stroller tours are offered the first Wednesday of each month, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm. Cost: Included with regular admission, \$12 general admission, \$7 students and seniors. 220 E. Chicago Ave., Chicago, (312) 280-2660, www.mcachicago.org.

Ride the Acorn Express at Morton Arboretum through October

See beautiful gardens, woodlands, wetlands and prairies in 30 and 60-minute tram tours aboard the open-air Acorn Express. Tickets are \$4-6. 4100 Illinois Route 53, Lisle, 630-968-0074,

Irish American Heritage Festival, July 8 - 10

Held at the Irish American Heritage Center, this "green" festival celebrates the best of Irish music, dancing, food and culture. Enjoy Irish entertainment on five stages. For a small daily fee, children have full run of a moonwalk, face paint-



Taste of Chicago
Photo courtesy of City of Chicago, Mayor's Office of Special Events



Fireworks at Navy Pier on July 4th and all summer long
Photo courtesy of Navy Pier



Family Fun Fest at Millennium Park
Photo courtesy of Javet Kimbel

ers, picnic games and other attractions. Sing an Irish song and try out for the Sham-ROCK Stars! - a singing contest for kids under 18. \$14 adult, \$8 in advance, 12 and under free with a paid adult. 4626 N. Knox, Chicago (773)282-7035. www.irishfestchicago.com

Chinatown Summer Fair, July 17

Give your kids a taste of the Orient, but much closer to home. This neighborhood festival features a Lion Dance procession at 1:00 p.m. with Asian cultural entertainment and music. Enjoy a sampling of Chinatown's many restaurants, unique gift shops, Chinese arts and crafts exhibit, children's area. 10 a.m. - 8:00 p.m., Wentworth Ave from Cermak Rd. to 24th Pl in Chicago.

AUGUST

Art at the Glen, Aug 7 - 8

The Glen Town Center in Glenview plays host to one of the North Shore's most popular art festivals, now ranked one of the top 15 festivals in the country. While you're admiring the art, you can stroll, shop or dine in the Glen Town Center. Free hands-on art projects for children and a scavenger hunt where kids can go through the festival looking for different types of art listed on a bingo card, then receive an "Official Art Explorer" sticker. Free admission. www.amdurproductions.com

Wood Dale Prairie Fest, August 11-14

Kick back for a fun weekend of music from rockin' regional bands, including the classic sounds of national headliner, SURVIVOR. Held at the Town Square in Wood Dale, celebrate Prairie Fest with food, regional and national music acts, fireworks, carnival, pet parade and more. 630-766-4900, www.wooddale.com

Chicago Air & Water Show, August 20-21

Once again, you can look to the skies for this fabulous display of air-istocracy. The U.S. Navy Blue Angels and U.S. Army Parachute Team Golden Knights headline the show from Fullerton to Oak Street with North Avenue Beach as the focal point. Held at the Chicago Lakefront, the water and air portions are combined for one continuous show beginning at 11 a.m. and

ending at 3 p.m. both days. Free admission. (312)747-0832. www.explorechicago.org

SEPTEMBER

North Shore Greek Fest, September 2- 5

This festival is an annual fundraiser for the Hellenic American Academy and features authentic Greek food, traditional Greek pastries and Greek Gourmet Market, plus a full schedule of Greek music and dancing. There are special kids' games and entertainment and I love watching the smiling students perform the Greek dances. My personal favorite -- I never miss it. Admission/donation requested. 1035 Lake Cook Road, Deerfield, 847-317-1063, www.hellenicamericanacademy.org

Buffalo Grove Days September 1 - 5

The 52st annual Labor Day Festival features an arts & crafts fair, food tent with specialties from local restaurants and non-profit groups and live entertainment on several stages. Families will share plenty of good times at the carnival, bingo, parade, barbeque challenge, kid's craft tent, business fair, pancake breakfast and 5K run. Fireworks on 9/4 at 9.20 p.m. Free admission. Lake Cook Road & Raupp, Buffalo Grove. (847) 459-2500. www.vbg.org.

Highwood Last Call Art Fair, September 17-18

Sponsored by the Highwood Chamber of Commerce, this popular art fair is now in its third year. The Highwood Last Call Art Fair features the work of 130 juried artists exhibiting original art. The idea is that artists would rather sell their works for less, than hold on to them until next year. I've picked up some great bargains. There's food and music, too. Held in downtown Highwood. www.amdurproductions.com

Remember, the season is short. So get off that lawn chair and get out there. Wishing you and your family a warm and sunny summer, filled with lots of great memories!

For more summer events, visit www.explorechicago.org, www.enjoyillinois.com, www.chicagofree.info and www.fairsandfun.com/illinoisfairsandfun.html



All aboard the Acorn Express at the Morton Arboretum
Photo courtesy of Morton Arboretum



Daring stunts at Chicago Air & Water Show
Photo courtesy of City of Chicago



Kids love the carnival games at Wood Dale Prairie Fest.
Photo courtesy of City of Wood Dale