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CONTACT:

Patrice Roche, Marketing & Communications Specialist

Photo requests: By e-mail to patrice.roche@elmhurst.org

OPENING JUNE 27 – OCT. 2, 2022

Eat Your Heart Out: Iconic Chicagoland Foods

Elmhurst History Museum's latest exhibit takes on Chicago's famous specialties

ELMHURST, IL — Does ketchup ever belong on a hot dog? Is real pizza cut in squares or triangles? And is Italian beef meant to be consumed soaking wet or dry? These confounding conundrums are at the core of the Elmhurst History Museum's latest exhibit, "Eat Your Heart Out: Iconic Chicagoland Foods," which will be open from June 27 through October 2, 2022 at the Elmhurst History Museum, located at 120 E. Park Ave. in downtown Elmhurst.

The exhibit serves up the history of some of the classic Chicago food icons as well as the often-colorful innovators and establishments that earned the devotion of generations of foodies. "Eat Your Heart Out" focuses on three stalwart pillars—mainly pizza, hot dogs and Italian beef—to learn about the origins of these famous Chicago and suburban specialties. The exhibit considers the stories behind the companies and entrepreneurs with names familiar to any Chicago food fan, such as Portillo's, Vienna Beef, Lou Malnati's and more.

A key aspect of "Eat Your Heart Out: Iconic Chicagoland Foods" will be not only these well-known foods, but also the traditional ways that Chicagoans consume them. The tavern style vs. deep dish controversy will be explored, and condiments will be a hotly-debated topic including the proper way to deck out a true Chicago hot dog and the right ingredients to concoct an ideal *giardiniera* garnish. The exhibit also

dips into the history of ice cream and particularly one of the legendary Chicago desserts—the five-tiered Rainbow Cone.

The Big Three

Elmhurst History Museum’s Curator of Exhibits, Dan Bartlett, researched and designed the “Eat Your Heart Out” exhibit, and throughout the process he was aware of the controversy and passion that swirl around the “Big Three” when it comes to Chicago foods. However iconic their stature, he noted, they are all foods that have humble origins.

“Pizza, hot dogs, and Italian beef all started as affordable, immigrant food for working class people,” said Bartlett. “While pizza and hot dogs were brought to Chicago from overseas and have many regional variations, Italian beef was invented here. Today companies like Portillo’s are taking it to other parts of the country, but Chicagoans eat more Italian beef than all the rest of the country combined. Chicago also developed the perfect condiment in giardiniera. These things are not disputed, but what does arouse passion is how that Italian beef should be eaten—dry or dipped and with hot or mild giardiniera—those questions evoke controversy among locals.”

For Bartlett, learning about the history of some of the key Chicago area creators of these iconic dishes was an interesting discovery process. “All of them started out at a single location emphasizing a single kind of food, but essentially each one was in the right place at the right time,” Bartlett said. “They had faith in their own unique recipes, but their recipes were about much more than the food itself. They were also focused on the customer experience—about the quality of the food and the quality of the experience they wanted people to have when they came through the door.”

Amidst the profiles, photos, memorabilia, and video oral histories featured in the exhibit, Bartlett has added some engaging elements to share the stories of these food icons. Visitors can learn not just about the foods but what makes them special, including a giardiniera wall with more than 60 varieties on display. A “Food Fight” ballot will be provided so visitors can vote on their own Chicago favorites with results tallied weekly. Children will enjoy the designated play area where they can serve up hot dogs, pizza and ice cream from a food cart.

Exhibit-Related Programs

The Elmhurst History Museum will present a number of engaging programs and special events related to the “Eat Your Heart Out: Iconic Chicagoland Foods” exhibit throughout the summer. More information about reservations and program details be found at elmhursthistory.org/320/Programs.

Sunday, July 10: SPECIAL SUMMER EVENT — Picnic on Park, Free, 1:30-4:30 p.m.

The Elmhurst History Museum is throwing a Chicago foods celebration on the lawn with family-friendly games and crafts, face painting and live performances by the Scottie Long Duo and Leonardo Music. Visitors can explore the exhibit and see the Oscar Meyer Wienermobile and a vintage 1929 Vienna Beef delivery truck. Free small Rainbow Cones will be available to the first 300 guests (one/person, additional ice cream available for purchase after giveaway).

June 27, July 18, August 8: Museum Maker Mondays, Free, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

Families can drop in at the museum on a day designated for young visitors and their caregivers to explore the galleries, play games and make a food-themed craft. Participants are welcome to bring lunch to enjoy on the grounds.

Sunday, July 24: Gallery Talk with the Curator, FREE, 12 p.m.

Curator Dan Bartlett will lead participants through highlights of the exhibit. An online version will be available on the museum’s web site following the live talk.

Thursday, July 28: Chicago Foods Trivia Night, \$30/person, 7 p.m.

Adults can play a rousing round of trivia to test their Chicago foodie knowledge at Pints in Elmhurst. The program includes two rounds of trivia, one beer and four individual appetizers.

Wednesday, August 3: Family Pizza Making Workshop, \$20/person, 4 p.m.: Families can hone their culinary skills by participating in a hands-on pizza making workshop with Chef Holston. Learn to make dough from scratch, decorate a chef hat, and make a personal pizza to take home and bake.

Sunday, August 28: Iconic Chicago Foods Lecture with Leslie Goddard, Free to Members; \$5/Non-members, 2 p.m.: Historian Leslie Goddard takes a look at five iconic Chicago foods and connects them to Chicago’s patterns of immigration, creativity and cultural traditions that led to their storied fame.

Exhibit and Visitation Information

Celebrate Chicago’s food traditions this summer with the new exhibit, “Eat Your Heart Out: Iconic Chicagoland Foods.” The exhibit will be on display from June 24 through October 2, 2022 at the Elmhurst History Museum, located at 120 E. Park Avenue in downtown Elmhurst. Museum hours are Sunday and Tuesday through Friday from 1 to 5 p.m., and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free, and

limited free parking is available. The exhibit is sponsored by Feze Roofing, Guaranteed Rate/John Noldan, Itasca Bank and Trust, and Lakeside Bank. For the latest information, please visit www.elmhursthistory.org.

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The Elmhurst History Museum is a department of the City of Elmhurst supported by the Elmhurst Heritage Foundation, a 501c3 non-profit organization. The Museum is located at 120 E. Park Ave. in downtown Elmhurst. General admission is free. For more information, call 630-833-1457 or visit our web site at elmhursthistory.org.