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## Evanston's 4th of July Celebration Sets 2024 Theme

*The Evanston Fourth of July Association hopes this year's 'Seeds of Change' theme inspires residents to plant new ideas as the Celebration grows into its second century*

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EVANSTON, IL - Organizers announced today that the theme for this year's hugely popular Evanston Fourth of July Celebration will be "Seeds of Change" to focus on both the city's and the event's future growth as it moves into the next century.

The Evanston Fourth of July Association hopes the theme will help residents and local businesses come up with ideas to keep the annual city-wide celebration - a 100-year-old, completely donation-funded event that includes traditional family games at local school playgrounds, a youth fun run, a well-known parade and then ends with a lakefront evening concert and fireworks - fresh, inclusive and welcoming to all, said EFJA President Tracy Alden.

To give residents a tangible sense of the "Seeds of Change" theme and showcase it for the community, local businesses will sponsor large planters that will be decorated by local artists, students and community groups and distributed around the city in June. They will be planted with plants and objects of the artists' choice to underscore the decorations.

Before settling on this year's theme, the EFJA board informally polled a variety of community groups to better understand what they most valued about the annual Independence Day celebration - as well as to get suggestions for how to improve it and help it better reflect all of Evanston's residents.

"Every year, we choose a theme that we hope will help inspire people to participate in the Celebration," Alden said. "We heard from people that they see the Celebration as mostly about family and friends, and our country, and that they're really proud of Evanston's diversity.

"But in the past, not everyone felt welcome by the small group of residents who originally founded the Celebration," he said, "and we'd like to make sure that's never the case again - thus this theme."

Once decorated, organizers hope the planters will show what the artists love about the Celebration, express ideas for community change and invite conversation around important topics such as democracy, freedom, diversity, reparations, the environment and hope for the future.

“Art has traditionally been an important way to express big ideas, and we’re hoping this gives everyone in the community a vehicle to do that and talk about what they’d like to see in Evanston going forward,” said Alden.

Organizers also hope the planters and discussions help re-inspire Evanstonians to once again build large-scale floats that represent their neighborhoods and community groups, said Bruce Baumberger, an EFJA emeritus trustee who’s helped organize the event for more than 50 years.

“Last year’s return to the Celebration after three years was so enthusiastic, and we want that to continue,” Baumberger said. “We’re trying to be a better Evanston, and we really want to move the Celebration into this next century with that sense of joy as well as growth.”

The registration deadline for this year’s parade is May 1.

Organizers are also calling for volunteers to help with this year’s Celebration; parade marshals, fun run and games supervisors and other supporters are needed to help with the events. For more information, to volunteer or to donate, please call (847) 637-5236 or visit <https://evanston4th.org/>.