



**WAWA WELCOME AMERICA 2017 FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES 50 FREE EVENTS CELEBRATING
THE NATION'S INDEPENDENCE DAY, JUNE 29 – JULY 4, 2017**

New Events, Time Honored Traditions and a Few Surprises for 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, Philadelphia, PA (MAY 23, 2017) – The Honorable James F. Kenney, Mayor of the City of Philadelphia, and Welcome America, Inc. today announced 50 free events that will create the **2017 Wawa Welcome America** six-day festival Thursday, June 29 through Tuesday, July 4. The *Wawa Welcome America* festival celebrates American history, education and Philadelphia. The 2017 festival will encompass free, patriotic events throughout the City and concludes with 12 hours of non-stop commemorations and celebrations on July 4th. The theme of this year's 25th Anniversary *Wawa Welcome America* is "Everyone is a History Maker."

Every day of the festival, there will be a Philadelphia museum open to all for free and simultaneous free events all around town for all ages designed with wide-appeal: families, the 21+ Millennial crowd, multicultural, multigenerational, and all are inclusive and open to all. Events include free major concerts, block parties, art exhibitions, movie screenings, and educational events.

The festival kicks off on Thursday, June 29 at noon at Independence Mall in Philadelphia's Historic District with the annual **Wawa Hoagie Day** honoring U.S. troops and concludes on July 4 with the most patriotic events right where it all began at Independence National Historical Park plus the *Wawa Welcome America July 4th Concert and Fireworks* starring **Mary J. Blige** and **The Philly POPS® BIG Band** on the stage in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The *Wawa Welcome America July 4th Concert* will honor Philadelphia hometown icons Boyz II Men, the best-selling R&B group of all time with an astounding 64 million albums sold.

The festival schedule has not-to-be-missed events and they are all FREE. A festival schedule and event details can be found at the brand new WelcomeAmerica.com. Festival brochures can be found at local Wawa stores in five states – PA, NJ, DE, MD and VA. Downloadable festival guides are available at NBCPhiladelphia.com. Festival guides in Spanish can be found at both WelcomeAmerica.com and Telemundo62.com. *Wawa Welcome America* offers hotel packages and travel offers at WelcomeAmerica.com. Another great comprehensive travel resource for planning a trip is VisitPhilly.com.

Wawa Welcome America 2017 festival highlights:

A BIG KICK-OFF TO THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY

It all starts with Wawa Hoagie Day – Kicking off the festival on Thursday, June 29 at noon at the National Constitution Center at Independence Mall is the crowd-favorite Wawa Hoagie Day. The 25th annual Wawa Hoagie Day honors U.S. troops. Witness a 6-ton hoagie salute, enjoy free Wawa hoagies, a performance by the USO Show Troupe, and a hoagie building competition of enormous proportions

between police and firefighters. In addition, the National Constitution Center is open for free courtesy of Wawa. Thursday, June 29 from 12 – 2 p.m.

Wawa Welcome America Debut! Culture on Tap presented by the Mayor’s Office of Arts & Culture and Parks & Recreation that together developed a pop-up beer garden with cultural entertainment in City Hall’s Courtyard. **Culture on Tap** is Philadelphia’s highly popular mobile beer garden. Thursday, June 29 from 4 – 9 p.m.

Wawa Welcome America Debut! Food Trust’s Night Market Spruce Hill: Independence Day Weekend Edition at 40th & Walnut Streets will offer a unique family-friendly culinary experience with street eats, live music and neighborhood pride. This is the Food Trust’s debut in West Philadelphia. Thursday, June 29 from 6 – 10 p.m.

NEW EVENTS FESTIVAL-WIDE

More Fireworks! Four Fireworks Shows including two simultaneous July 4th Shows at 9:30 p.m. on the Delaware River and at the Philadelphia Museum of Art on the Schuylkill River – Three fireworks shows, presented by **NBCUniversal and Pyrotecnico**, will paint Philadelphia’s skies red, white and blue. In 2016, *USA Today* named Philadelphia’s *Wawa Welcome America Fireworks* on their list of “10 of the nation’s Best 4th of July Fireworks Shows.”

- *Wawa Welcome America Fireworks* presented by **NBCUniversal and Pyrotecnico** will take place over the Delaware River Waterfront. Official viewing areas include the Delaware River Waterfront, SugarHouse Casino, and One Liberty Observation Deck. Friday, June 30 and Saturday, July 1 at 9:30 p.m.
- The grand finale includes two simultaneous shows, the *Wawa Welcome America Fireworks* presented by **NBCUniversal and Pyrotecnico** over the Benjamin Franklin Parkway on the Schuylkill River partners with *The Freedom Festival Fireworks* at Wiggins Park over the Delaware River Waterfront **sponsored by the Camden County Chosen Board of Freeholders**. Official viewing areas include the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Schuylkill River, the Delaware River Waterfront, SugarHouse Casino, and One Liberty Observation Deck. Tuesday, July 4 at 9:30 p.m.

New! Events for Millennials 21+

SugarHouse Casino’s Red, White & Brew will feature an evening of great food, drinks, and entertainment by Mo Lowda and the Humble along the Delaware River Waterfront. Following the food and music, attendees can enjoy the spectacular fireworks show as SugarHouse Casino is an official viewing area for fireworks. Saturday, July 1 from 5 – 9 p.m.

New! Red, White and Blue Happy Hours & Brunches – A new version of the previous *Wawa Welcome America* event called “Taste of Philadelphia” returns in a brand new format of Fourth of July themed happy hours and brunches with food, crafty cocktails, and live entertainment at individual restaurants. Participating restaurants include: Moshulu, Art Bar | Sonesta, City Tap House Logan, Cafe Cret, Midtown Continental. For a complete list of restaurants and bars, visit WelcomeAmerica.com.

- Friday, June 29 from 4 – 7 p.m. kick off the holiday weekend at a featured happy hour location for the chance to grab some July 4th swag and enter to win two tickets for a VIP experience at the *Wawa Welcome America July 4th Concert and Fireworks*. Visit WelcomeAmerica.com for a complete list of happy hour locations.
- Sunday, July 2 enjoy a Red, White and Brunch at featured Philly favorite brunch spots. Visit

WelcomeAmerica.com for a complete list of brunch locations.

New! The Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts Independence Weekend Salute to Musical Theater at Philadelphia's Historic District Block Party on July 3 on the Freedom Stage – For the first time during *Wawa Welcome America*, Broadway shows will be performed in Philadelphia's Historic District. The star-studded lineup gives audiences a sneak peek at the 2017-2018 Broadway Philadelphia season featuring performances from some of Broadway's hottest shows coming straight to Philadelphia. Monday, July 3. Time TBD.

New Twist! A Wawa Welcome America Favorite Returns, the Sand Sculpture Spectacular – 2017 will see the return of the art of sand sculpting. Beginning June 20, world-renowned sculptors will transform the **Rotunda at The Shops at Liberty Place** into a Sand Sculpture Spectacular with hand-carved scenes depicting Philadelphia icons and historic figures out of 24 tons of sand. Attendees can also see a pop-up sculpture in the neighboring One Liberty Observation Deck. Debuts June 20 through the month of July.

New Events in More Philadelphia Neighborhoods Presented by Wells Fargo and produced by The Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy, and *Wawa Welcome America* – Citywide Community Day **Performances in Public Spaces**, will showcase ten performers in ten different neighborhoods across Philadelphia as well as a fun activity for attendees to enjoy. Performances are FREE and family friendly ranging from hip hop dancing, jazz, capoeira, and storytelling performed in historic homes, public parks and squares, and plazas that are in the heart of these communities. Saturday, July 1. Times vary.

WAWA WELCOME AMERICA TRADITIONS

PECO GO 4th & Learn – *Wawa Welcome America* is about engaging children throughout Philadelphia with educational activities, to encourage learning while school is out for the summer. Courtesy of Books In Homes USA, 9,000 free books will be provided to children. Beneficial Bank and Beneficial Foundation games and activities on financial literacy will travel to all events, and additional free giveaways will be provided for kids to enjoy. Go 4th & Learn's fun educational interactive activities and demonstrations highlight American history, financial literacy, STEM, Spanish language, fitness & health, and arts & culture at the Mummies Museum, Fairhill Square, and the steps at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Free Museum Days – Five days of free admission to ten museums including the National Constitution Center (courtesy of Wawa), the Penn Museum, Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site (evening), the African American Museum in Philadelphia, One Liberty Observation Deck (morning), Philadelphia Museum of Art (pay what you wish), The Barnes Foundation (courtesy of PECO), the National Liberty Museum, the Philadelphia History Museum, and The Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection at Temple University.

Philly @ The Movies presented by St. Christopher's Hospital for Children – When the sun goes down, the screens go up for free movies under the stars. Three free outdoor movie screenings will take place at The Piazza at Schmidt's, the steps at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Franklin Square.

Free Concerts – The highlight of every *Wawa Welcome America* festival is all the free musical entertainment. This year's concert lineup includes:

- Free family-friendly performances citywide including **The Mummies Museums' Summer Mummies Concert, The Philadelphia Orchestra, and U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own" June 29 – July 1 at 8 p.m. Various Locations.**
- **Philadelphia's Historic District Block Party** on July 3 will feature three performance stages for artists to showcase their freedom of expression; the arts, music and speech. The Block Party will

be followed by a performance by **The Philly POPS** in front of Independence Hall at a new time beginning at 7 p.m. Bring your picnic baskets and your friends. Monday, July 3 from 12 – 8 p.m.

A BIG TUESDAY, JULY 4TH TO CONCLUDE THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Celebration of Freedom Ceremony – On the morning of July 4, The City of Philadelphia’s Office of the City Representative will present the *Celebration of Freedom Ceremony* at Independence Hall at 10 a.m. where Philadelphia’s music icons **Boyz II Men** will be honored for their achievements in music and philanthropy. **The Philly POPS® BIG Band** debuts. The Wawa Foundation will also present **The Wawa Foundation Hero Award**. The award is presented to a non-profit organization that is committed to serving the greater Philadelphia area. Financial grants of \$80,000 will be awarded. **Mayor Kenney** will present the **Magis Award** to Philadelphia Hometown Hero **Ralph Galati**. Mr. Galati’s service has been honored with The Silver Star, The Bronze Star with Valor with one Oak Leaf Cluster, The Air Medal with four Oak Leaf Cluster, The Air Force Commendation Medal with two Oak Leaf Cluster and The Purple Heart with one Oak Leaf Cluster. Tuesday, July 4 at 10 a.m.

Independence Day Parade – 4,000 marchers will parade through Historic Philadelphia during the patriotic Independence Day Parade. Tuesday, July 4 at 11 a.m.

All-Day Entertainment and Commemorative Events – Enjoy FREE entertainment on Independence Mall while exploring Philadelphia’s Historic District.

- Join Independence National Historical Park for its annual **Let Freedom Ring Ceremony** which begins at 1 p.m. behind Independence Hall followed by a Bell Tapping Ceremony at 1:45 p.m. at the Liberty Bell Center (plan to be in line by 1 p.m.).
- **6th Annual Birthday Party at the Independence Visitor Center** hosted by Betsy Ross and Termini Bros. Bakery – A spectacular five-tier cake will be decorated and 2,500 cupcakes displayed in the shape of an American flag at the Visitor Center throughout the morning starting at 9 a.m. The birthday celebration begins at 1 p.m. when Betsy Ross will lead the crowd in singing “Happy Birthday.” Stop by after the parade for a slice of cake. First come, first served.
- On July 4, the Betsy Ross House hosts a **Children’s Naturalization Ceremony**. Sponsored by the Flag House Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, witness 13 children take the Oath of Citizenship in this moving ceremony at 1:30 p.m.

THE PARTY ON THE PARKWAY

Enjoy five blocks of FREE entertainment, food and fun for all ages July 4 from 12 noon to 7 p.m. at **Party on the Parkway**. Families can enjoy an interactive kid’s area featuring the Strider Bikes obstacle course, Zipline, games, and make-and-take arts and crafts. Animal lovers can bring their furry friends to enjoy the Amtrak Pet Friendly area. The 21+ crowd can kick back and relax in two beer gardens, and all can enjoy the diverse food and music from the Philly Groove stage.

LIVE NATION PHILADELPHIA PRODUCES THE JULY 4TH CONCERT ON THE PARKWAY

- For the second year, **KIDZ BOP Kids** will perform the group’s only free live concert on July 4 on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway at 1 p.m. on the main stage. Bring the kids!
- The *Wawa Welcome America July 4th Concert* on Independence Day is free, open to the public and **begins promptly at 7 p.m. (a new time)**. Celebrity performances on the iconic Benjamin Franklin Parkway will headline the non-stop live concert featuring food trucks, beer gardens and fun activities. Performers include:
 - Musical pioneer and “the Queen of Hip-Hop Soul,” **Mary J. Blige**, her only free concert in America during her “Strength of a Woman” tour.
 - A ceremony honoring Philadelphia hometown icons **Boyz II Men**.

- o **The Philly POPS® BIG Band** joined by **Mandy Gonzalez** from the Tony Award-winning hit musicals *Hamilton*, *In the Heights* and *Wicked*, and Billboard top 10 jazz singer, pianist and songwriter **Tony DeSare**. The POPS were the first performers at the very first free concert on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in 1993.

THE POWER OF COMCAST NBCUNIVERSAL AND NBC10 & TELEMUNDO62

Through the combined assets of Comcast NBCUniversal, Philadelphians across the region will be able to experience the iconic celebration on television and online on NBC10, Telemundo62, Cozi TV, TCN, and TeleXitos. NBC10 will broadcast the *Wawa Welcome America July 4th Concert and Fireworks* live during primetime in its entirety from 7 to 10 p.m. on Tuesday, July 4 and in Spanish on Telemundo62 from 7 to 8 p.m. The free concert will also be live streamed on NBCPhiladelphia.com and Telemundo62.com.

SPONSORS MAKE IT ALL FREE!

2017 sponsors/partners of the festival include The City of Philadelphia, Wawa, Comcast NBCUniversal, Live Nation Philadelphia, Philadelphia International Airport, Visit Philadelphia, One Liberty Observation Deck, PECO, Wells Fargo, St. Christopher’s Hospital for Children, SugarHouse Casino, Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau, Amtrak, Beneficial Bank, Beneficial Foundation, Pennsylvania Lottery, Pyrotecnico, The Schmidt’s Commons, The Shops at Liberty Place, Sonesta Philadelphia, Tastykake, Books In Homes USA, Aetna, Moshulu, Keystone Property Group, Old City District, Kindy’s, and Global Philadelphia. Sponsorship opportunities are still available, email information@welcomeamerica.com for more information.

About Welcome America, Inc.

Welcome America, Inc. is a 501c3, non-profit organization in public-private partnership with the City of Philadelphia. Welcome America, Inc.’s mission is to promote American history, education and Philadelphia. The organization seeks to enhance the resident and visitor experience through citywide events that provide an economic boost to the local economy. Moving forward, Welcome America, Inc. will produce and assist in the growth of select city events year-round that can increase awareness of Philadelphia as an event destination.

For more information, visit www.WelcomeAmerica.com. Join the conversation at:

- Facebook – www.facebook.com/WawaWelcomeAmerica
- Twitter – www.twitter.com/July4thPhilly
- Instagram – www.instagram.com/July4thPhilly

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Wawa Welcome America Quotes:

Honorable James F. Kenney Mayor of the City of Philadelphia

There is nothing more patriotic than celebrating America's independence in America's birthplace. Each year the City of Philadelphia welcomes its residents and visitors to come together during this free, multi-day festival that commemorates our collective American history in the city where it all began.

Welcome America, Inc. President & CEO Jeff Guaracino

Wawa Welcome America has been bringing Philadelphia and the nation together to celebrate Independence Day for 25 years. Each festival has been a fun, family-friendly party that is free and open to everyone. We are pleased to carry on that tradition and Welcome America again in 2017.

Wawa President & CEO Chris Gheysens

We are honored to celebrate our history and independence as the title sponsor of our region's largest July 4th celebration. Wawa has been involved in Welcome America for all 25 years and has renewed our commitment through 2019, as this is one of our most meaningful partnerships to date.

NBC10 and Telemundo62 President & General Manager Ric Harris

Through NBC10 and Telemundo62's complete coverage of *Wawa Welcome America*, we are providing everyone the opportunity to experience the thrill of 4th of July on the Parkway. Whether you're watching on-air, online, on-demand, or attending on-site, Philadelphians will feel like they are part of this iconic Independence Day celebration.

VISIT PHILADELPHIA President & CEO Meryl Levitz

For 25 years, this festival has been a reason for people to visit Philadelphia. So we're proud to support *Wawa Welcome America*, and the year-round draw of Philadelphia's Historic District. We know there's no better place to celebrate the Fourth of July. As our With Love ad puts it, "Philadelphia knows a thing or two about revolutions."