



Contact:  
Mackenzie Lunde  
GdB Pitch  
612.547.5042  
[mlunde@gdbpitch.com](mailto:mlunde@gdbpitch.com)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Gophers coach P.J. Fleck to Grand Marshal Aquatennial's CenterPoint Energy Torchlight Parade**

*Fleck to "Row the Boat" down Hennepin Ave. on Wednesday, July 19 at 8:30 p.m.*

**MINNEAPOLIS (July 10, 2017)** – The Minneapolis Aquatennial announced today that the new University of Minnesota football coach **P.J. Fleck** and his family will be the grand marshals of the 2017 CenterPoint Energy Torchlight Parade. Coach Fleck will help lead the largest night time parade in Minnesota on Wednesday, July 19 from 8:30 p.m.-10:30 p.m.

"The company feels privileged to be a part of the great city and community of Minneapolis," said **Brad Tutunjian**, CenterPoint Energy division vice president of Gas Operations in Minnesota. "To celebrate the strong relationship between the company and those who reside in the communities we serve, CenterPoint Energy is pleased to be sponsoring the 78th annual CenterPoint Energy Torchlight Parade for the seventeenth consecutive year, providing safe, quality entertainment for all."

As one of the biggest and brightest parades in the state and a Minneapolis Aquatennial flagship event, this one-of-a-kind display will light up downtown Minneapolis with a procession of bands and entertainment units marching down Hennepin Avenue from the Basilica of St. Mary to 5<sup>th</sup> Street.



"My family and I are honored to be part of the CenterPoint Energy Torchlight Parade," Fleck said. "Everyone has been so welcoming to us since we arrived in January, and I am looking forward to meeting more of our fans and embracing the local culture and traditions. I have heard wonderful things about this family-friendly event and how it helps bring a community together to celebrate our elite city of Minneapolis. I am excited to see all the decorative floats and parade units and to be part of the longstanding Aquatennial tradition. Ski-U-Mah and Row the Boat!"

The 2017 parade marks the 17<sup>th</sup> year that CenterPoint Energy has taken part in the Aquatennial festivities and sponsored the Torchlight Parade. The parade, along with the fellow flagship event Target Fireworks on Saturday, July 22 at 10 p.m., book-end four jam-packed days of Aquatennial events and programming that features more than two

dozen free and family-friendly events throughout downtown and along the Mississippi Riverfront—where the city was born.

Aquatennial goers can get to the CenterPoint Energy Torchlight Parade by [bus or light rail for free thanks to Metro Transit](#), which is offering free ride passes from 4 p.m. to midnight on Wednesday, July 19. Free ride passes are available to download at [aquatennial.com/torchlightparade](http://aquatennial.com/torchlightparade) and must be printed for use on any bus or light rail train.

The Aquatennial has also partnered with the City of Minneapolis to bring [Tap Minneapolis](#) water fountains to the CenterPoint Energy Torchlight Parade. These water stations will be available along Hennepin Avenue during the parade as well as the Twin Cities Orthopedics Torchlight 5K, which runs down Hennepin Avenue from 7:30–8:30 p.m. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own water bottles to the event and utilize the many fountains along the parade route for refills. CenterPoint Energy will also be handing out clip-on lights to lucky parade-goers throughout the evening.

“Aquatennial will again feature four days of free activities this year, and the CenterPoint Energy Torchlight Parade is a great way to kick off the festivities,” said Aquatennial Festival Director **Leah Wong**. “There is something for all ages and abilities as we celebrate community and fun here in the heart of our city.”

Coach Fleck became the 30<sup>th</sup> coach in Gopher football history when he was hired on January 6. Fleck, 36, is one of the youngest and brightest minds in the game. He was named Mid-America Conference coach of the year in 2014 and 2016. He turned Western Michigan’s program around, turning a 1-11 Broncos team in 2013 during his first season into a 13-1 squad in 2016—winning the school’s first MAC championship since 1988 en route to a Cotton Bowl appearance.



Along with Coach Fleck, the parade will feature CenterPoint Energy’s famed mascots Buddy Blue Flame and Wanda Water Heater, marching bands, Minneapolis Aqua Jesters and more. K102 returns again this year to emcee the CenterPoint Energy Torchlight Parade featuring their morning show hosts, Chris Carr & Company.

Before the parade, attend the Aquatennial’s Loring Park Family Fun Night from 5 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. featuring pony rides, inflatables, Wilderness Inquiry Voyageur Canoe Rides, USTA Northern Rally the Family tennis lessons, a kids dance, carnival games and more. Following Loring Park Family Fun Night will be the Twin Cities Orthopedics Torchlight 5K. Watch as thousands of runners take off down Hennepin Avenue beginning at 7:30 p.m.

The CenterPoint Energy is sure to ignite the Minneapolis night with more than 90 parade units and 75,000 spectators. For more information, please visit [aquatennial.com](http://aquatennial.com) or follow our **@Aquatennial** accounts on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) using the hashtag #Aquatennial.

**About the Minneapolis Aquatennial**

The Minneapolis Aquatennial is the Official Civic Celebration of the City of Minneapolis offers outstanding entertainment and activities in the City of Lakes for all ages. It is managed and produced by the mpl's downtown council. The festival is sponsored by Target, CenterPoint Energy, City of Minneapolis, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, Hennepin County Medical Center, Minnesota Twins, K102, Go 96.3 FM, CBS Radio and more. For more information, please visit [aquatennial.com](http://aquatennial.com) or call (612) 376-7669.

**About the mpl's downtown council**

Founded in 1955, and one of the most historic business associations in the nation, the mpl's downtown council (mdc) is a membership-based entity that works to create an extraordinary downtown. The mdc's collaborative development of the Intersections: Downtown 2025 Plan is designed to help downtown businesses, community leaders and citizens build on downtown assets and implement future goals. For more information, please visit [mplsdowntown.com](http://mplsdowntown.com).

**About CenterPoint Energy**

CenterPoint Energy, Inc., headquartered in Houston, Texas, is a domestic energy delivery company that includes electric transmission & distribution, natural gas distribution and energy services operations. The company serves more than five million metered customers primarily in Arkansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas. The company also owns 54.1 percent of the common and subordinated units representing limited partner interests in Enable Midstream Partners, a publicly traded master limited partnership it jointly controls with OGE Energy Corp., which owns, operates and develops natural gas and crude oil infrastructure assets. With more than 7,700 employees, CenterPoint Energy and its predecessor companies have been in business for more than 150 years. In Minnesota, CenterPoint Energy is the state's largest natural gas distribution utility, serving about 840,000 customers in 260 communities. The utility also operates a non-regulated business in Minnesota called [Home Service Plus®](http://HomeServicePlus.com). For more information, visit [CenterPointEnergy.com](http://CenterPointEnergy.com).

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