

Following a Green Line from sunset to sunrise



All aboard for another all-nighter.

First organized by the public art organization Northern Lights.mn in 2011, Northern Spark is the Twin Cities' version of a European "nuit blanche," an activity-packed "white night" that entices arts lovers to stay out until dawn. Never quite the same, Northern Spark has been sprawling some years and geographically compact in others — and in its seventh year it's growing again, spreading out along a transit line linking the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Dubbed "Climate Chaos|People Rising," this year's festival returns to the theme of climate change and a host of related issues, including water scarcity, migration and environmental justice. Festival organizers partnered with Metro Transit to explore that theme through 70 participatory art projects arrayed along seven METRO Green Line stops in and between the Twin Cities' poles.

Sparkers who make it from one end of the festival to the other will experience seven distinct neighborhoods linked by the light rail line. Starting from the east, the seven activity nodes include St. Paul's trendy Lowertown neighborhood (around the Union Depot station); a hub of the region's Southeast Asian immigrant community in Little Mekong (Western Avenue); the historic heart of St. Paul's African-American community in Rondo (Lexington Parkway); the emerging Little Africa of the Midway neighborhood (Snelling Avenue); the University of Minnesota's East Bank, home to the Frank Gehry-designed Weisman Art Museum (East Bank); Cedar Riverside, what some call the capital of the Somali immigrant community in the U.S. (West Bank); and The Commons, the new Minneapolis park at the center of fast-developing East Town (U.S. Bank Stadium).

The festival's 8:30 p.m. opening ceremony takes place at the western terminus of that route in The Commons park, where Mayor Betsy Hodges will start off Northern Spark 2017 by revealing this year's winner of the Creative City Challenge, ORBACLES, three structures described as "speculative infrastructure for bird populations" that attempt to anticipate shifts in bird habitats caused by a warming climate. The ceremony will also feature a performance by MacPhail Community Youth Choir.

This year's festival falls during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, and the Northern Spark activities

in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood include an interfaith iftar, the evening meal that breaks a day-long fast. It's just one example of how this year's festival both poses provocative questions about climate change ("Climate Chaos") and celebrates the diverse cultures of the Twin Cities ("People Rising"). Other events include the inaugural Little Africa Film Fest, held outdoors a one-block walk from the Snelling Avenue Station, and the Little Mekong Night Market running until midnight near Western Avenue Station, featuring food, art and craft vendors in a Southeast Asian-style street market.



Marina Zurkow with Valentine Cadieux, Aaron Marx, and Sarah Petersen, Making the Best of It: Dandelion, West River Parkway, Northern Spark 2016. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.

Northern Spark

When: 8:59 p.m June 10–5:26 a.m. June 11

Where: Various locations along the METRO Green Line

Info: 2017.northernspark.org