

# Beacon to join 4th of July displays

## Building to fire up dormant roof light

By Charles Storch  
Tribune staff reporter

A beacon atop the Palmolive Building, once a fixture of Chicago's night sky but mostly a memory for the last quarter-century, is to be lighted for the 4th of July, though only for several hours.

Kim Dooley of Draper & Kramer Inc., which manages the Palmolive, a landmark building at 919 N. Michigan Ave., said Monday that the beacon would be turned on from about 8 p.m. to midnight Wednesday. It is to oscillate in an arc over Lake Michigan, from about where Belmont Avenue would extend into the water to about Monroe Harbor.

She said Draper assured residents of two taller, neighboring towers that it would light the beacon for Wednesday night only and restrict its sweep so that the strong beam would not annoy them.

If all goes well Wednesday, her firm may seek permission to light the beacon on other special occasions, Dooley said.

Draper bought the 37-story Palmolive in 2001 and converted it from offices to condomini-



Photo courtesy of Hedrich and Blessing  
**The beacon blazes through the night sky from the top of the Palmolive Building in 1930.**

ums. In 2001 and 2002, it conducted brief and not very successful tests of a refurbished World War II beacon it had bought. Each time, neighbors complained about the light and won sympathy from their alderman, Burton Natarus.

"When [people] look out the window, they won't see the moon. They won't see the stars," Natarus said in 2002.

Dooley said her firm refined the beacon, adding a shield to focus its beam and prevent peripheral scattering of light at its base. The condo association boards at the nearby John Hancock Center and 1 Magnificent Mile then gave Draper the green light for a single holiday test of the beacon.

Ald. Brendan Reilly (42nd), Natarus' successor, said he is going along with the test but "will be monitoring it to make sure it is not disruptive to neighbors." As for the possibility of future lightings, he said, "Let's see how the test goes."

The Palmolive, an Art Deco beauty designed by Holabird & Root, opened in 1929. A year later, the Lindbergh Beacon, named for the famed aviator, was installed atop its mast, some 600 feet from the ground.

The beacon, described then as "the world's most powerful searchlight," became a skyline icon and a boon to aviation. Its rotating beam pierced the night, and its fixed beam pointed pilots to what is today called Midway Airport.

The Lindbergh Beacon glowed until 1981, when it was shut amid complaints from dwellers of taller buildings that had been constructed nearby. It was removed in 1988 and donated to a Wisconsin museum.

[cstorch@tribune.com](mailto:cstorch@tribune.com)