

Palmolive Beacon lights up the lake again



By Cheryl Burton

July 4, 2007 - A beacon that used to light up the Chicago skyline was turned on again Wednesday night.

From 8 p.m. until midnight, the light atop the Palmolive Building at 919 N. Michigan shined on the lakefront.

It is called the "Lindbergh Beacon" after the famed pilot. The light used to help guide other pilots to what's now called Midway Airport. But the light was turned off in 1981 because of complaints from people living in nearby high rises.

There were similar complaints when the buildings new owners tried testing the beacon in 2001.

"We have narrowed the angle considerably. And we have added baffles and made it so there is no glow. There is actually a direct beam. And it will only focus over the lake in a very narrow, moveable arc," said Kim Dooley, Draper & Kramer Inc.

Dooley said the original beacon is in a Wisconsin museum.

"The beacon that's on the building is a refurbished World War Two and it is the largest beacon in the world that's moveable," said Dooley.

It cost more than a half million dollars to buy the beacon and hoist it by helicopter to the top of the building and when it comes to conserving energy, it is efficient.

"The average hourly cost is five to six dollars of electricity, that's all," said Dooley.

If all goes well, the management company said it may seek permission to operate the beacon on special occasions.