



Skydeck Chicago's The Ledge Now Daring Visitors to Stand Out

**New Skydeck experience takes visitors on journey through the
best of Chicago and brings the city to their feet – literally**

CHICAGO – July 1, 2009 – Skydeck Chicago at Willis Tower, formerly Sears Tower, dares visitors to be among the first to step onto The Ledge, a series of glass bays that extend from the building's 103rd floor, when it opens to the public Thursday, July 2. Reaching out more than four feet from Skydeck Chicago's west side, visitors have unobstructed views of Chicago – 1,353 feet straight down. In addition, guests will enjoy brand new interactive exhibit spaces that offer a "one stop Chicago" cultural experience on their way to the top.

"The Skydeck has evolved to challenge our visitors' curiosity," said Randy Stancik, general manager, Skydeck Chicago. "You only need to see the forehead prints on the windows to know that visitors are constantly trying to catch a glimpse below. The Skydeck attracts more than one million visitors annually who enjoy views of up to 50 miles and four states. Now, they have a fifth view right at their feet."

The Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM), the building's original designers, provided an innovative plan for this architectural and engineering achievement. SOM designed The Ledge so that the fully enclosed glass boxes rest between conveyor belts. The boxes retract into the building, allowing easy access for cleaning and maintenance. Each box provides unobstructed views of people, taxis, boats and bridges over Wacker Drive and the Chicago River.

"The Willis Tower set architectural and engineering standards when it was first built and now we are able to carefully craft new elements that expand the capabilities of the original design while retaining its integrity," said Ross Wimer, design partner, SOM.

"The Willis Tower has always been about innovation. For this new Skydeck experience, we have kept with that tradition. Cantilevering out from the side of America's tallest building, the viewing platform will allow visitors to see the incredible city of Chicago literally beneath their feet. This is a great addition to the Willis Tower and to Chicago," added Bill Baker, structural engineer partner, SOM.

An unmatched view is not all that Skydeck Chicago offers. From the moment visitors arrive, they enjoy an entirely new queuing experience, and interactive and educational museum-quality exhibits. The exhibits highlight the iconic landmark, and celebrate Chicago's sports, architecture, pop culture, history, food, music and people. Interactive displays feature the city's rich history, major Chicago attractions and fun facts. And visitors can stand on video screens to see what Chicago staples would look like if they were standing on The Ledge, 103 floors above the pitching mound at Wrigley Field, Millennium Park's Cloud Gate, North Avenue Beach and more.

The multimedia elevator gives visitors one of the fastest rides in the world up more than one hundred flights, while giving visitors points of reference for the heights they are ascending along their journey to the 103rd floor. Combined with The Ledge, the Skydeck Chicago experience will provide visitors from all over the world an encompassing view of the building and the city.

“Skydeck Chicago celebrates Chicago’s rich history and culture through architecture and educational programs that enhance the Chicago experience for all ages,” said Stancik. “In a single trip up to 103, visitors will see and learn about the best the Windy City has to offer.”

Experts in international structural glass design, Halcrow Yolles, fully designed and detailed all the glass and steel components. Commenting on Halcrow Yolles’ work, senior principal and structural glass engineer, John Kooymans, said: “Architects Skidmore, Owings and Merrill designed the building originally and developed the initial concept for the boxes. Halcrow Yolles engineers took that one step further by eliminating all perimeter structural steel at the sides and along the floor of the glass enclosures and created a near-invisible support system. This was accomplished by hanging the boxes from cantilevered steel frames and hiding structural frames behind ceilings and drywall. In fact, the only visible hint of support appears as small clips on the sides or floor.”

MTH Industries, the Chicago-based 120-year-old glass and architectural metal contractor that installed Cloud Gate in Millennium Park, installed The Ledge’s glass panels. Each glass box is comprised of three layers of glass laminated into one seamless unit. The low-iron, clear glass is fully tempered and heat-soaked for durability. In addition, the motorized system that projects and retracts the boxes from the building utilizes steel LinearBeams.

Skydeck Chicago is open daily April – September from 9 a.m. – 10 p.m. and October – March from 10 a.m. – 8 p.m. For more information, please visit www.theskydeck.com or call 1.877.SKY.DECK.

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About Willis Tower

Willis Tower is the premier corporate office building in Chicago, offering more than 4.5 million square feet of office and retail space. Located in Chicago's West Loop at 233 S. Wacker Drive, the skyscraper is easily accessible from the commuter rail stations, highways and all forms of public transportation. Standing 1,450 feet and 110 stories tall, Willis Tower is the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere and an integral part of Chicago’s culture. Originally opened in September 1973, it is home to more than 100 different companies, including prominent financial services firms, law firms and insurance companies. Willis Tower boasts spectacular vistas of Chicago, with views that can reach nearly 50 miles on a clear day. Willis Tower also boasts a tremendous infrastructure system, which includes enormous telecommunications capacity and unsurpassed electrical capacity and reliability. The Skydeck at Willis Tower on the 103rd floor attracts more than 1.3 million visitors per year.

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