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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 17, 2015

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MAYOR EMANUEL OPENS NORTH LAWNDALE LANDMARK REBORN AS NICHOLS TOWER

Former Sears Tower to be Hub for Arts Education, Workforce Development and Community Services

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today joined Ald. Michael Scott Jr., John and Alexandra Nichols, representatives from the Homan Square Foundation, and community stakeholders to reopen Chicago's original "Sears Tower" as a new economic, educational and cultural hub. A North Lawndale icon since 1906, the 14-story structure at 900 S. Homan Ave. was renovated as part of a five-year, \$15 million area revitalization project.

"Whether it is inspiring a child through digital media or impacting a family through housing services, Nichols Tower represents Chicago because it represents hope," said Mayor Emanuel. "This tower is the culmination of years of collaboration and planning, and now it will serve as a key resource for countless people throughout the City of Chicago."

Vacant since 1987, the tower previously served as the formal entrance to Sears Roebuck and Co.'s sprawling Merchandise Building. The tower's reopening is part of a decades-long, City-assisted revitalization of former Sears properties that includes the development of health and daycare facilities, affordable housing, educational buildings, and other community uses. With its renovation, the tower was renamed in honor of benefactors John and Alexandra Nichols, whose generosity supported its redevelopment.

"We are thrilled that such a diverse and talented group of organizations are committing to the Nichols Tower and to the vision of Homan Square," said Kristin Dean, Foundation for Homan Square president. "Our goal from day one has been to transform this property into an asset for all residents of North Lawndale and the surrounding communities. Completing the Nichols Tower is the capstone of that effort."

Tenants in the 35,000-square-foot structure include the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; Free Spirit Media; North Lawndale Employment Network; Turning the Page; Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago; and the Foundation for Homan Square. Tenants will offer a wide range of community services including: art courses and workshops; job readiness and skills training classes; youth leadership training and mentoring for at-risk community youth; support services for area youth and families who have experienced trauma; literacy-based child mentoring activities and summer learning programs; new homeowner education, fixed-rate mortgage lending and foreclosure prevention services; and new businesses recruitment and retention.

Soaring 250 feet high, the tower was the tallest building in Chicago outside of downtown at the time of its construction. Designed by architects Nimmons & Fellows and clad in brick and terra cotta, the building originally served as a formal entrance to the Sears' nine-story Merchandise Building, which contained three million square feet of manufacturing and distribution space. The tower's upper floors contained offices for company staff, secretarial training facilities, and an open stair core. From 1924 to 1928, the tower's 11th floor was home to WLS, one of Chicago's first radio stations, created by Sears to advertise itself as the "World's Largest Store."

In 1974, Sears relocated from North Lawndale to a new Sears tower in the Loop. In 1987, the Merchandise Building was formally closed. Starting in 1989, developer Charlie Shaw, Sears chairman Ed Brennan and retired Sears vice president Charley Moran developed a concept plan designed to reinvigorate the community through a multi-phase initiative known as "Homan Square." A 1993 agreement between Sears, the City of Chicago, the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, and other entities preserved the tower when the Merchandise Building was demolished.

Under Mayor Emanuel the City has supported and invested in a number of projects to revitalize the Homan Square area. The projects include the new UCAN seven-acre campus to provide support and services for up to 70 abused and at-risk youth. The Sterling Park Apartments will convert a former Sears building into 181 affordable apartments, including 66 for CHA residents. Homan Square phases V and VI are creating a total of 94 new mixed-income and affordable apartments on formerly vacant land.

Additionally, a 2008 project converted a former Sears facility into a 300-student high school, and Homan Square phases I –IV (1994- 1998) built more than 300 units of rental and for-sale units in a mix of single-family and two-flat homes.

The tower and several nearby properties formerly affiliated with Sears were designated an official Chicago Landmark district in March 2015. The designation provided financial and technical resources to help enable the building's renovation. It is also listed on the National Register for Historic Places.

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