

# Eagles march into history

*Sandburg band performs at Palmer House Hilton's 140th anniversary celebration*

by Heather Warthen

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After the past two years, the Carl Sandburg High School Marching Eagles seem destined to be a band that finds its way into the history books.

First, it was a gig in Washington, D.C., playing in the 56th Presidential Inaugural Parade on Jan. 20, 2009. And just last week, the Marching Eagles marched their way into history books again as they helped celebrate the country's longest continually operating hotel celebrate their 140th birthday.

Forty-five members of the 195-member Marching Eagles played for attendees at the Palmer House Hilton's 140th Anniversary Ceremony Wednesday, Sept. 15. A Historical Landmark Dedication also took place at the ceremony. The hotel's actual anniversary is on Sept. 26.

While the band may have caught the attention of President Barack Obama during the parade last year, they also caught the attention of someone close to home — Palmer House Hilton General Manager Dean Lane, who resides in Orland Park.

"The topic of a band playing at the ceremony came up and I mentioned my hometown band played in the inaugural parade," Lane said prior to the ceremony. "Two hours later, I received the information that they were going to be able to play at the ceremony. I'm overjoyed."

Lane became the general manager in October 2008 at the Palmer House Hilton. Prior to that he served as the hotel manager since February 2006 and he, along with his wife, Heather, and son, Samuel, moved to Orland Park. The hotel, which was founded by Chicago's Potter Palmer and presented to his wife Bertha as a wedding gift, is one of the country's remaining 26 Grand Palace Hotels. It is known for its Empire Room, Red Lacquer Room and Grand Ballroom.

"I have to tell you that there is never a dull day at the Palmer House," Lane said. "Just when you think you learned everything about the hotel and the history, you learn something new. I often describe it to people as a city within a city. It takes more than 900 people to operate it on any given day.

"It's more like being a mayor of a city than running a hotel sometimes. There is a lot of variety involved and it's great meeting people all over the world with this type of heritage and history. Most people work their entire career to work at a hotel like the Palmer House."

The ceremony featured appearances from Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley, Chicago Alderman Brendan Reilly, Thor Equities' Joseph J. Sitt and was led by famed Chicago television journalist Bill Kurtis.

"It's taken at least two-and-a-half months to plan," Lane said. "Bill Kurtis officiating is a real treasure and with Mayor Daley, it's a really good lineup."

The ceremony featured several speeches, the unveiling of the historic landmark plaque, a confetti cannon and the performance by the Marching Eagles.

"We will be playing about 30 minutes of music, including patriotic music, current pop hits from Lady Gaga, and The Black Eyed Peas, and oldies such as "Hey Baby," "Can't Take My Eyes Off You" and "Chicago," Marching Eagles Band Director Stewart Bailey said.

Lane said the pastry chef at the Palmer House also created a decadent in the likeness of the hotel for guests to eat. Following the reception, Lane said that tours of the hotel would be given, including showing off the \$150 million dollar restoration that took place in October 2008.

Bailey said the Marching Eagles were honored to be chosen for the event.

"It is quite an honor for our band to be chosen to help celebrate the 140th Anniversary of the Palmer House," he said. "We feel as if our students will be a part of Chicago history. It will also be an honor for our students to see Mayor Daley, Bill Kurtis and the local news media."

For Lane, marking his hotel as a historic landmark was a way for them to recognize Chicago.

"This hotel becoming a landmark really belongs, even though it is private ownership, to Chicago," he said. "I'm looking forward to celebrating the Palmer House with Chicago as a landmark institution."

With the hotel open 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, Lane said there are two things he loves about his job — watching his team members grow in positions and be promoted and creating lasting memories for guests.