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CHA, Chicago Seniors get ready to Dance the Day Away *27th Annual Senior Gala has grown into a can't-miss party*

WHAT: CHA's 27th Annual Senior Gala
WHERE: Hyatt Regency Hotel, 151 E. Wacker Dr.
WHEN: 11 a.m., Saturday, Dec. 17, 2011

CHICAGO – The Chicago Housing Authority's Senior Gala is the hottest ticket in town to a large segment of the city's senior population. Lauralyn Billups knows this well.

A volunteer and coordinator for various senior events, Billups arose at 4:30 a.m. this summer to purchase tickets for 40 of her friends. When it comes to the Gala and its ambience, nothing less than being first in line will do. The event traditionally sells out within hours of tickets going on sale.

"The show is not only onstage, but offstage," said Billups, who has attended the Gala for the last 12 years. "The golden shoes, the velvet, the old-time hats. And the dancing: the electric slide, line dancing, rock n' roll. When the singers come out, the people dance with a chair if they don't have a partner."

"The event makes seniors really feel like they're important, and that they aren't the forgotten ingredient in the 'City that Works.'"

More than 2,000 decked-out Chicago seniors are expected to attend the sold-out **27th Annual Senior Gala**, which will take place at **11 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 17, 2011, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, 151 E. Wacker.**

CHA busses seniors in from all over the city, and for four hours, they eat, dance and have the time of their lives. Entertainment is provided by the Gentlemen of Leisure, a versatile house band that plays a catalog of hits from acts ranging from Earth, Wind & Fire to Beyonce.

The Senior Gala was introduced as the Christmas Grand Ball Gala in 1983. It was a huge production then, as it is now. But since the arrival of CHA Director of Senior

Programs Donna Dixon 16 years ago, the event has flourished – growing from about 300 people to 2,000 over the last several years.

When she started, Dixon literally went from door-to-door to drum up interest. She turned the focus away from the long speeches and put the spotlight squarely on the seniors.

“We made it into a party for the residents, and, in the beginning, we really had to push that,” Dixon said. “Word of mouth began to spread that we made it into a party. And, each year, more and more people came. It became a place where seniors could dance and socialize. Before you knew it, you looked up and there were 2,000 people packing the room. It’s taken on a life of its own the last 10 to 12 years.”

Now? Seniors line up as early as 4:30 a.m.

Billups, as always, can’t wait for Saturday.

“The food is served royally – white glove service,” she said. “The gifts are a big deal. And everyone knows the menu better than the chef does.

“For the seniors that go, this is more than just a Christmas party.”

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