

Newsletter: July 2009

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Upcoming SLN Events

No meeting at Grace Place this month. Instead:

Summer Dance w/ Funkadesi
Thurs. July 9, 6-9:30 p.m.
Grant Park, Spirit of Music Garden, 601 S. Michigan Ave.
Come dance with your neighbors! Look for the SLN group among the tables: we'll stake out an area and have bright orange helium balloons to help you find us in the crowd. The 13th annual Chicago Summer Dance Series presents free Bhanga dance lessons by Shamilia Khetarpal, 6-7:00, and live music by Funkadesi, 7-9:30, performing East Indian, funk, and reggae sounds. More info at [SLN website calendar](#). Free to all.

South Loop Photo Contest: Submission Deadline July 15.
South Loop Neighbors invites entries to its 10th Annual Photo Contest & Show, a juried exhibition with more than \$1000 in cash prizes. Photographs should exemplify the lifestyle, culture or history of the South Loop. [Click for more info.](#) To download a photo submission form, visit the [SLN website](#), and open the Photo Show article on the main page.

Story Tour of the South Loop
Thurs. July 16 & Fri. July 17: SOLD OUT
Fri. July 24 & Thurs. July 30: SPACE STILL AVAILABLE 6:30 p.m.
Nearly every building in the South Loop has a story to tell - the ornate architecture, the work done inside, the characters who drank there, the travelers who embarked there, or the scandals that hatched there. Take an early evening walking tour to learn some of these stories, on a ramble from the old St. Luke's Hospital at 15th and Michigan, past the site of the Chicago Coliseum and Film Row, by the sites of bus and train stations that welcomed new Chicagoans arriving on the Great Northern Migration, through the new-town-in-town of Dearborn Park and the renovated lofts and historic architecture of Printers Row.

The tour should take us about two hours, and we'll wind up at Blackie's, which has been welcoming thirsty travelers since 1933, for a well-earned cold beverage to conclude the evening. The tour will be led by Chicago cartographer and historian Dennis McCleendon. Tour Price: \$20, or \$10 for members of South Loop Neighbors or the South Loop Historical Society. Not a current member? You can join now. [Click the links above for either sponsoring organization. More info.](#) Due to popular demand, we've added two additional tour dates - July 24 and 30 - but space is limited. Reservations required. [Click here to RSVP.](#)

Quick Links

Join SLN or Renew Your Membership
At the website, [click Join](#) on the right end of the menu bar.

Sloopin
A blog devoted to everything in the South Loop. From entertainment to restaurants, from news of the Olympic race to arguments about parking meters and rumors about condo developments, from reports on the CTA to rotating photos from around the "sloop," the site is full of all sorts of useful and comment-worthy stuff. Deserves a link in your favorites.

Neighborhood News and Opinion
If you really want to talk South Loop - politics, real estate, or events - view the new Chicago Journal website is the place to do it. I confess, it's become my latest obsession (and time vacuum), but I feel more informed and involved than ever before, all without leaving my Aeron chair. There are conversation strings about articles printed in the weekly newspaper in addition to frequent blog posts by Bonnie and Micah along with lively comments from the 'hood. The Journal's new website format is really beginning to come alive. [Check it out.](#)

Discounts at Local Businesses
What's in your wallet? If you carry an SLN membership card, you should remember to pull it out and use it. Free coffee here, 10% off your burger there, discount on your yoga class or massage, even savings on electronics and entertainment; it all adds up. Remember to check the SLN website every now and then to see the latest additions to the list of **SLN Business Partners**. (Look for the article on the homepage.) New Partners this month: Best Buy and Jazz Showcase. And more coming soon!

Happenings

Farmers Market in Printers Row
Every Saturday, 7 a.m.-2 p.m. thru Oct. 31.
The Saturday Market was forced to relocate due to the long-awaited renovation of Printers Row Park. The Market is now on Federal St., just north of Polk St. Therefore, Federal St. will be closed to traffic and off limits to parking from 5 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays.

Jazz Showcase
July 2-4: Ian Torres Latin Jazz Big Band
July 6: Dave Schumacher Quintet
806 S. Plymouth Ct. in the old Dearborn Station. Check out some jazz over this holiday weekend. SLN members get \$5 off every show, any time. See coupon at the bottom of this email for more info.

Concert in the Park by VanderCook College of Music
Tues. July 7, 7 p.m.
Women's Park & Gardens, behind the Clarke House Museum, 1827 S. Indiana Ave.
Bring your lawn chairs and blankets, pick a spot to sit, and listen to the sounds of famous marches, showtunes, movie themes, and concert band classics the whole family can enjoy. Presented by Near South Planning Board and Prairie District Neighborhood Alliance. Concert is free to all.

Cavalia
Beginning July 14.
An equestrian spectacle of dance and music, will make its Chicago debut beginning July 14 in the West Loop at Racine and Jackson. The location is the Fannie May site, which is intended for future development of a retail shopping complex. This multimedia show features more than 100 two and four-legged artists. The mix of horses, acrobats, aerialists, dancers, riders and musicians is said to transport spectators to dream-like settings while celebrating the timeless bond between horses and people. For more info, visit the [Cavalia website](#).

Dearborn Park Garage Sale
Sat. July 18, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Rain date: July 19
9th St. and Plymouth Ct.
Save the date: find a good no-longer-keep possessions or shop for some excellent bargains to bring into your home. Or just come to browse and see all the great stuff your neighbors have. Questions? Call 312-961-3434.

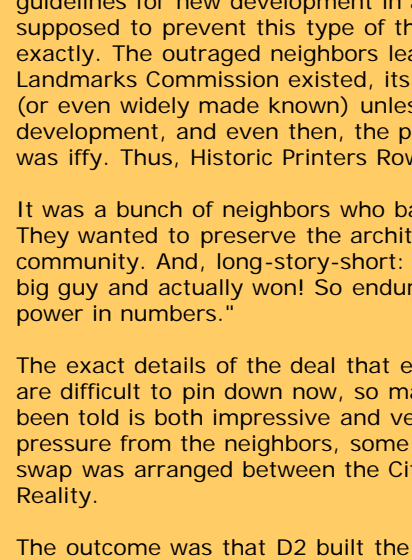
Recently, I was taken by surprise when a dear old friend and neighbor gazed at me with that suspicious please-don't-ask-me-for-money look in her eye. "What exactly does South Loop Neighbors do?" she asked.

She's lived in the neighborhood for many years, so I am amazed that she doesn't know. But after joining the SLN board this year, and making the org a regular part of my "what's up lately" conversation, I have learned that my friend is not alone. She may not even be in the minority. It seems lots of people in the area don't know the whats and whys of South Loop Neighbors.

So, I've written on that subject in this month's newsletter. I hope that you will read this, despite the fact that you are already on our mailing list and probably have at least some idea about SLN. And here, I hope that you will forward this email to a neighbor who isn't currently on our list. If this email was forwarded to you, I invite you to click the Join Our Mailing List button in the left column to start receiving your own community updates. This month's theme: membership matters.

Members Move Mountains

by Helen Kaplow, SLN VP
photo by Jonathan Michael Johnson



The recent groundbreaking of what is to be a new Printers Row Park tells an important story. Back in the old days - 1998 or thereabouts - when the neighborhood was still primarily composed of urban pioneers who had built - often with their own hands - what are now the much sought-after and much-copied lofts of the now-charming but once-abandoned historic Printers Row, back in those days, a big developer announced his intentions to build a big new modern building just south of the old Transportation Building on S. Dearborn St.

The neighbors didn't like the idea. The new, proposed building did not fit the character of the neighborhood, nor did it conform to the guidelines for new development in a historic district. Wasn't the city supposed to prevent this type of thing from happening? Well, not exactly. The outraged neighbors learned that, even though a Chicago Landmarks Commission existed, its rules weren't necessarily enforced (or even widely made known) unless someone actively opposed a new development, and even then, the process of challenging the new project was iffy. Thus, Historic Printers Row Neighbors was born.

It was a bunch of neighbors who banded together for a common cause. They wanted to preserve the architecture - and lifestyle - of their community. And, long-story-short: they won. The little guys fought the big guy and actually won! So endures the age-old adage, "There is power in numbers."

The exact details of the deal that emerged from that historic wrangling are difficult to pin down now, so many years later, but the story I have told is both impressive and very timely. It seems that, with pressure from the neighbors, some sort of land swap and/or zoning swap was arranged between the City of Chicago and the developer, D2 Realty.

The outcome was that D2 built the South Loop's first-ever high-rise condo (almost 400 ft. tall) at 701 S. Wells, just west of the historic strip on Dearborn. The neighbors got the promise of a park on the disputed parcel of land, a promise that for various reasons took ten years to fulfill (it is the City of Chicago, after all). But that park will be not just a lovely place to sit on a sunny afternoon; it will stand as a reminder that when a community cares and works together, mountains (and skyscrapers) can be moved.

These days, the neighborhood's population and boundaries have grown, and Historic Printers Row Neighbors has morphed into South Loop Neighbors. The hot-button issues of the area have also evolved. We now struggle with parking problems and adequate space in local schools for our local children. We worry about our buildings being green. And of course, we still care about preserving our history and thoughtfully shaping our future.

So, that's what SLN does: We start by keeping our members informed about what's happening in the community. Then, as necessary, we work with city agencies and local developers to address neighborhood needs and interests.

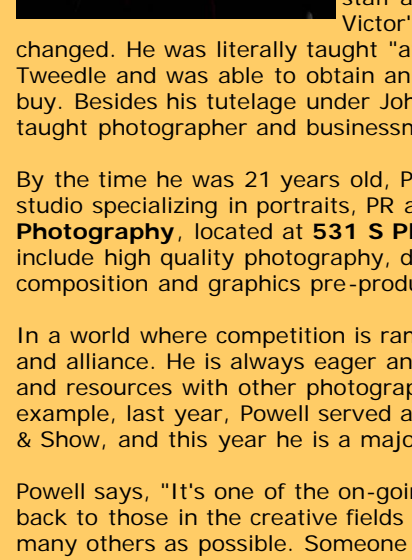
But wait, there's more. We don't just care about buildings. We care about people too. This year has seen a slew of new social and cultural events sponsored by SLN. We've had a community dinner, a networking night, an evening at Jazz Showcase, a lecture about Burnham's Plan of Chicago, a showcase reading of South Loop writers, and tours of the Harold Washington Library Center. This month will see a group outing to the Summer Dance Festival, historic walking tours of the South Loop, and the submission deadline for our 10th annual South Loop Photo Contest & Show (which will open next month).

In order to accomplish our goals and offer this variety of programs, we need your support - in dollars and voices. SLN requests a modest membership fee of \$35 for individuals and \$55 for households. The key is that through membership, we build a cohesive community infrastructure that empowers and enriches us all.

At South Loop Neighbors, we believe that an active and well-supported neighborhood organization is essential to the success and stability of the community at large. We invite you to participate in these efforts: 1) [Join now](#); 2) Spread the word (forward this newsletter to a neighbor).

Focus on Photography

Business Profiles: Central Camera Co. and Powell Photography
by Ronald E. Childs, SLN Board Member



Among the many historical distinctions of the South Loop is that our neighborhood is home to Chicago's oldest camera store, **Central Camera Company**, now 110 years old and located at **230 S. Wabash Ave.**

The company is currently marking its third generation of same-family ownership and staff. It was founded by Albert Flesch, a Hungarian native who had left his home at age 13, alone and bound for Chicago. Flesch started his work career in the camera department of one of the large downtown department stores. With this initiation to photography, he opened Central Camera in a storefront at 31 E. Adams St. in 1899. The year marked the 60th anniversary of the invention of photography. George Eastman had revolutionized the market with easy-to-operate Kodak box cameras, first introduced in 1888.

Albert Flesch offered the innovative service of commercial developing and print processing at his store in 1900 and also introduced a mail-order catalog. By this time, Chicago had built the first generation of skyscrapers, and the elevated tracks already defined the "Loop."

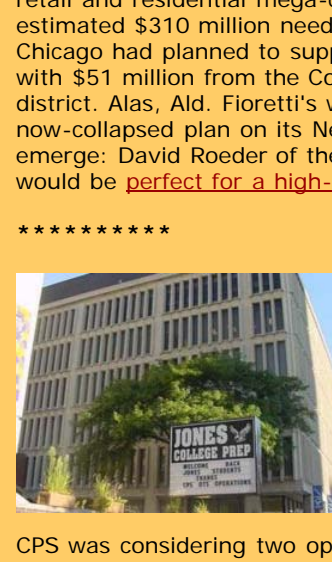
Central Camera prospered and, after a move to another location on Wabash Avenue, settled in 1929 at its present location, in what had been a piano store. Albert's two sons, Stanley and Harold, had started in the business by then. Harold's son Albert "Don" Flesch, the current owner, started working in the store as a schoolboy in the 1950s.

The family has handed down a great deal more than a livelihood: it has handed down a tradition of expert service and quality equipment. To this day, the store offers one of the most extensive selections of new and vintage cameras, lenses and accessories, film, and digital and related equipment.

The store's website proudly posts a copy of letter from Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, written on the occasion of the store's 100th anniversary. Daley writes, "Many things have changed in Chicago in the past century, yet the first destination for amateur and professional photo enthusiasts alike remains the same."

When asked about his sponsorship of the South Loop Photo Contest & Show, Don Flesch said, "We've been a part of the Loop all of our lives. Our customers have supported us all of our lives, and we want to be sure we support them."

Central Camera: 312-427-5580; www.centralcamera.com



Victor Powell's enthusiasm is still apparent, even after over 31 years in the photographic industry. Says Powell: "If I'm right, and I know I am, you don't settle for second best. Anyone can capture what you look like. I want to get what you feel like. That makes all of the difference and sets you apart."

Born and raised in Chicago and now both living and working in the South Loop, Powell's original goal was to become an electronics engineer. But after being taken under the wing and mentored by the nationally known photographer, John Tweedle - the first African-American on staff at the former *Chicago Daily News*, Victor's life and vocation was forever changed. He was literally taught "at the feet of the master" by Mr. Tweedle and was able to obtain an education that money could never buy. Besides his tutelage under John Tweedle, Powell is basically a self-taught photographer and businessman.

By the time he was 21 years old, Powell was the owner of his own studio specializing in portraits, PR and event photography. **Powell Photography**, located at **531 S Plymouth Ct.**, offers services that include high quality photography, digital imaging, graphic design, photo composition and graphics pre-production.

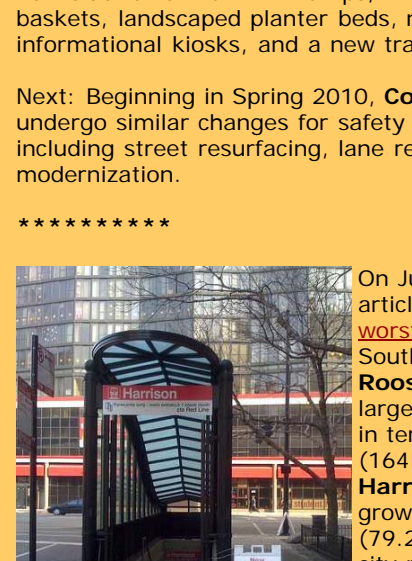
In a world where competition is rampant, Powell believes in friendship and alliance. He is always eager and available to share his knowledge and resources with other photographers, be they amateurs or pros. For example, last year, Powell served as a Judge for the SLN Photo Contest & Show, and this year he is a major sponsor.

Powell says, "It's one of the on-going goals in my life - not only to give back to those in the creative fields but to reach back and pull up as many others as possible. Someone showed me the possibilities and recognized that I had a talent, and it changed my life."

Powell Photography: 312-922-6366; www.powellphotography.com

South Loop Green Awards: Apply Now

by Stephanie Sauve, SLN Board Member



Almost two years ago, South Loop Neighbors joined other community organizations and businesses to form the Alliance for a Greener South Loop. Its purpose? To build on individual efforts to make the South Loop a more earth-friendly place to live, work and play. By working together as individuals, businesses, and community organizations, the Alliance believes we can make a bigger difference.

Since then, the organization has undertaken a number of projects to promote a greener South Loop. For example, they hosted a year-long series of discussions on topics related to greener living. And recently, they have been working to create a storm-water management garden in a Printers Row community space.

The Alliance is now rolling out the **Greener South Loop 2009 Awards and Recognition Program**, an initiative designed to do two things: recognize the efforts of South Loop businesses and residential buildings that operate in more earth-friendly ways; and provide ideas for those interested in adopting greener business or building practices.

Alliance co-founder Gail Merritt explains, "We've heard of so many different green actions that buildings and businesses have undertaken. We thought it would be a great time to both recognize those efforts, and help spread the word to others about what they could be doing."

Any South Loop business or residential building - rental or condo - that is proud of its efforts to be more green should apply for recognition from the Alliance. The program is designed to celebrate - and share - successes. In other words, the application is not like applying for LEED certification. (Note: Alliance for a Greener South Loop boundaries are: Van Buren to Cerma; Chicago River to Lake Michigan.)

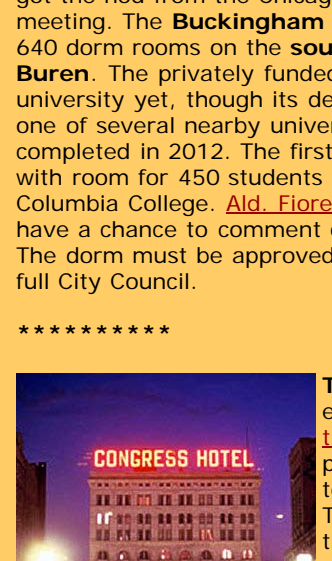
"First steps are important, so we plan to recognize early efforts as well as those that are well-advanced," Merritt says.

Applications can be completed online or via an electronic PDF form that can be printed and faxed or mailed. [Click here to access the online application](#) on SurveyMonkey.com. For more details, or to download a PDF form, visit the [Alliance website](#). Open the Awards and Recognition Program article to access the PDF.

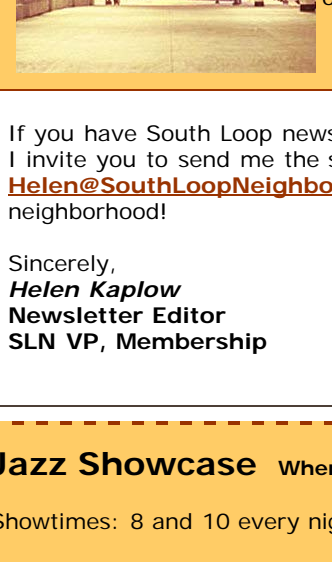
Applications must be received by July 31 and winners will be notified in September. All applicants will be invited to an event in October to award the winners and share their green practices in an idea-exchange forum.

Development Update

by Helen Kaplow, SLN VP



Old Post Office: The building formerly home to Chicago's Main Post Office - the 3-million-square-foot facility that bridges the Eisenhower Expressway (pictured to the left) - will be put on the auction block on August 27th. After more than a decade of trying to sell the massive, "incredible hulk" building through "inconventional channels," the U.S. Postal Service has decided to hand it over to the highest bidder. The suggested opening bid is \$300,000 (less than a Printers Row condo!). Until recently, Walton Street Capital LLC had planned to remake the empty facility into a multi-use office, hotel, retail and residential mega-complex. But the firm couldn't raise the estimated \$310 million needed to complete the deal. The City of Chicago had planned to support the redevelopment of the structure with \$51 million from the Congress/Canal tax increment financing (TIF) district. Alas, Ald. Fioretti's website still lists (and brags about) the now-collapsed plan on its News Page. But new ideas continue to emerge: David Roeder of the *San Times* suggests the old post office would be [perfect for a high-speed train hub](#) (and some federal dollars).



A new **Jones College Prep** high school building won't be ready for occupancy until the 2012-13 school year. That's what [Jose Alvarez, Chicago Public Schools \(CPS\) director of operations](#), told members of the [Jones local school council, parents and community members on June 8th](#). Alvarez said the new school would most likely hold 1,200 students.

CPS was considering two options for enrollment in the new building. One option would keep the selective enrollment process in place. The second would mix students taken in by selective enrollment with kids from the neighborhood. Decisions such as where the new Jones would draw an attendance boundary for the South Loop, should the school allow neighborhood kids, won't be made for some time. The Jones Local School Council (LSC), which has held a series of extra meetings to discuss the possibility of building an expanded facility on the cleared land south of the current school structure, unanimously approved a nonbinding resolution at the meeting that the number of South Loop students allowed in a new Jones be capped at 300, and that CPS offer "respect and understanding relative to" just use of TIF resources." The current proposal would allocate \$90m in TIF money to the new building.

9th & State, SE corner: This lot was the former home of the New Ritz Hotel single-room-occupancy housing, which was demolished in Summer 2008. Now, upon rejecting previous proposals, the Community Development Commission (CDC) will be issuing a new request for proposals (RFP) for development of this land, currently a parking lot. The city would like to see mixed-use residential, retail, office, educational, or institutional uses for the site. The target price is \$9.7 million with no TIF or other assistance being offered.

1600 S. block of Wabash, east side: The city recently purchased this land and will begin demolition in order to clear the way for a new park, operated by the Chicago Park District. Construction is slated to begin in 2011.

Streetscaping: South Wabash from Wacker to Roosevelt will, by the end of the summer, be resurfaced, have new sidewalks, new light poles, and be adorned with state-of-the-art landscape planters with irrigation. In addition, the EI structure will be repainted and its lighting insulated. These beautification and safety improvements are the result of TIF funding.

A \$10 million overhaul of **South Michigan** from Roosevelt to 24th Street was recently finished. The project included street resurfacing, new sidewalks with ADA ramps, 122 new trees, hanging planter baskets, landscaped planter beds, new light poles with banners, informational kiosks, and a new traffic signal at Michigan and 13th St.

Next: Beginning in Spring 2010, **Congress Parkway** will undergo similar changes for safety and aesthetic purposes, including street resurfacing, lane reconfiguration and walk-cycle modernization.

On June 25th, the *Tribune* published an article that named [some of the best and worst stops on the EI](#). Of interest to South Loop residents was that **Roosevelt CTA stop** has seen the largest growth - of all Chicago EI stops - in terms of ridership since 2000 (164.8%). Also of interest is the **Harrison stop**, which saw the largest growth on the Red Line since 2000 (79.28%). This would explain why the city recently [renovated and opened a south entrance/exit for the Harrison station](#), at Polk St., (pictured to the left) [which has been closed since 1968](#).

Crain's Chicago Business recently reported the widely-whispered rumor that the **Lofts at Roosevelt Collection will be going rental**: "The developer of one of the South Loop's most ambitious residential projects is [preparing to tear up contracts with condominium buyers](#) and convert the property into an apartment building." This switch by the 342-unit development (pictured below) would be a significant indicator of a larger shift as a South Loop condo glut turns into an apartment glut.

According to the *Crain's* article, "Roosevelt Collection is one of **eight new condo buildings** to be delivered this year in the South Loop. If they all go ahead, that would add **1,880 units**, more than in any other downtown neighborhood, according to Appraisal Research data. There also are three new apartment buildings coming to market, including Burnham Pointe, a former condo development that converted its 298 units last year. As other projects approach their delivery dates, there's a good chance more will convert, adding to the roughly 400 new apartments in the South Loop already available for lease."

The article includes a [fascinating map of South Loop condo projects](#), detailing the percentage sold at each and what *Crain's* calls "Pipeline Pressure."

Although the 400,000 square feet of retail space planned as part of Roosevelt Collection is also reported to be stalled, the one bit of happy news is that the **Kerasotes 16-screen movie theater** is still slated to open around November or December of this year.

Taking a different tact from the conversion-to-rental approach described above, but also representative of the sour economy, the *Chicago Mar* reports that **Museum Park** filed at least 42 lawsuits against buyers who failed to close on condos they contracted to purchase in the 1400 and 1600 Museum Park buildings and is [seeking to keep the would-be buyers' earnest money](#).

The biggest college town in Illinois? Chicago's Loop. So says a [new study](#), and it comes as no surprise to local residents, who have watched as student enrollment in our area has increased 25% over the past five years. Among the study's findings:

- The number of college students in the Loop / South Loop has grown to 65,524.
- The higher education institutions surveyed employ 15,087 people in the Loop/South Loop, with \$403 million in wages and salaries per year.
- Fourteen institutions spent more than \$420 million for renovation and construction during 2004-2009.
- Sixteen institutions reported spent more than \$857 million on goods and services during the same period.

"We feel this is encouraging news for Chicago," says Ty Tabing, the executive director of the Chicago Loop Alliance. "At a time when most economic sectors are shrinking, [the education sector in Chicago continues to expand and grow](#)."

In keeping with the above trend, and as the area becomes more of a traditional college campus and less of a commuter campus, plans for a **new Loop dormitory** with rooms for more than 1,200 college students got the nod from the Chicago Plan Commission at its June 18th meeting. The **Buckingham Phase 2** would rise 37 stories and house 640 dorm rooms on the **southeast corner of Wabash and Van Buren**. The privately funded building is not associated with any university yet, though its developers told the Commission they expect one of several nearby universities to lease it by the time it is completed in 2012. The first phase of the project, an adjacent dorm with room for 450 students that opened last year, is leased entirely by Columbia College. [Ald. Fioretti remains skeptical](#). The community will have a chance to comment on the project at two upcoming meetings. The dorm must be approved both by the zoning committee and by the full City Council.

The Congress Hotel, despite being enmeshed in a six-year-old strike, [and over the objections of an angry crowd](#), received permission by the Chicago Plan Commission to add to their Michigan Avenue building. The plan calls for a four-story addition on the southwest part of the hotel complex and a one-story addition at Michigan and Congress. The \$20 million expansion would increase the 14-story hotel's current capacity by 56 rooms, in addition to adding a swimming pool, restaurant, and health club on the roof.

If you have South Loop news or event info to share with your neighbors, I invite you to send me the scoop at Helen@SouthLoopNeighbors.org. I hope to see you around the neighborhood!

Sincerely,
Helen Kaplow
Newsletter Editor
SLN VP, Membership

\$5 Off Any Show*

* When you show your SLN membership card at the door.
Jazz Showcase: 806 S. Plymouth Ct. in Dearborn Station, 312-360-0234