

## The answer man

December 26, 2007

Concierge Jon Winke (right) has worked at the Ritz-Carlton Chicago since the hotel opened in 1975. Over the years, he's had to work plenty of magic for guests:

\* Winke transformed the hotel's ballroom into a makeshift basketball court for the New York Knicks, who wanted a last-minute practice session before playing the Bulls.



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(Al Podgorski/Sun-Times)

\* A guest wanted to see the premier of the movie "Disclosure" but he didn't want anyone sitting within three rows of him. Winke rallied staff members to go to the theater and buy enough tickets to block off several rows.

\* The 15-year-old son of a guest wanted to meet an actress he'd seen the previous evening in the Elvis show "All Shook Up." Winke suggested sending flowers to the theater with a note inviting her to lunch at the Ritz. The boy, his parents and the actress had a lovely meal.

\* A mother of the bride left her contact lenses in a taxi and was upset about having to wear glasses to her daughter's wedding. Concierge staff tracked down her California optician, got her prescription and had new contacts delivered to the hotel within two hours.

\* Winke helped arrange for an airplane to fly by the hotel with a banner that read, "Will you marry me Karen?" Karen said yes.

\* A rock band member was looking at an hour-long wait to get into a popular Rush Street restaurant. Winke called the restaurant's manager and the group was seated immediately. The musicians thanked Winke for "treating us like rock stars."

\* At dinner, a guest wanted to have Gospel singers perform. Winke called the House of Blues and got the talent contact for their Sunday Gospel Brunch to track down some performers.

\* A guest attending an Indian wedding couldn't figure out how to tie her sari. Winke tapped a contact at a nearby Indian restaurant who rushed to the hotel to help the woman get dressed.

\* For the record, lots of hotel guests ask for "Oprah" tickets; Winke estimates he's able to get them about 10 percent of the time. And the two restaurants everyone's clamoring to get into these days: Alinea and Table Fifty-Two.