

UL arrives in downtown Evanston

More than 150 employees of Underwriters Laboratories move into ‘vibrant, wonderful and welcoming community’



by **Les Jacobson**
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Andy Vick, executive director of Downtown Evanston, addresses the crowd Nov. 14 welcoming Underwriters Laboratories to Orrington Plaza. Credit: Les Jacobson

The venerable testing organization Underwriters Laboratories turned a new page in its 130-year history with a ceremony Tuesday welcoming employees to its new downtown Evanston offices.

Over the last week, approximately 170 employees have been moving into the top four floors of 20-story Orrington Plaza at 1603 Orrington Ave., where UL's large and brightly lit logo will soon dominate the south and north faces of the building.

"We've been waiting for this day for a long time," said Terry Brady, president and chief executive of the not-for-profit UL Research Institutes and UL Standards and Engagement.

Addressing about 100 people at Le Tour Restaurant, Brady said his family had lived in Evanston for more than a century and he was born and raised in the city.

"I'm an Evanstonian through and through. I know what a vibrant, wonderful and welcoming community this is," he said.



Terry Brady (right), president and CEO of Underwriters Laboratories Research Institutes and Standards and Engagement with Mayor Daniel Biss at Tuesday's welcoming ceremony for UL employees. Credit: Les Jacobson

Brady explained that UL had run out of room in its Chicago office and Northbrook campus.

“We had been looking for a space to grow and thrive and advance our mission,” he said, adding that the organization had explored sites in Chicago and other suburbs, but when presented with the opportunity to move into a great space in “this beautiful community ... we knew it was absolutely the right thing to do.”

‘Great fit’

Mayor Daniel Biss added that UL was “a great fit” for downtown with its “best-in-class safety and research.” He called UL’s arrival “important, critical and transformational for the economy of downtown Evanston” and pointed out that the city had moved quickly to secure the necessary variance for UL’s signage. “When we understood what was at stake, we knew our goal was to get to yes.”

Andy Vick, new executive director of Downtown Evanston, reminded the crowd that “more than 150 employees will be eating at our restaurants, shopping at our stores and using our services.”

City Council Member Jonathan Nieuwsma, in whose 4th Ward the building is located, said he interviewed at UL when he graduated college in the 1990s, but took another job.

“I’m glad we finally got together,” he said.

Underwriters Laboratories was founded in 1893 by engineer William Henry Merrill and was originally headquartered in Chicago before the firm moved to its Northbrook campus and – as of last week – Evanston location.