

World Trade Center Lights Mark New Skyline

By Maria Alvarez

A test of 1 World Trade Center's spire flickered a glow of kaleidoscope colors of reds, pinks, cobalt blues to purples and lavender until it became a beacon of red, white and blue Friday night, giving New Yorkers their first glimpse of lower Manhattan's new skyline since the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Further testing of the base of the spire, which stands at 408 feet, and its 96 LED fixtures will shoot white and colored lights onto the spire's rotating mirror. "We are finally complete," said Shanice Keene, 24, a hospital corpsman and petty officer third class in the Navy, as she looked up at the spire. Keene's ship, the USS New York, is built from the steel remains of the World Trade Center. Keene said seeing the lighted spire "is appropriate. Our ship's motto is 'strength forged through sacrifice and never forget.' It's important to take a moment and remember those who were lost due to war and terrorism." The lighthouse beacon will "rotate at one minute like the second hand of a clock," said Jordan Barowitz, of The Durst Organization, which is conducting a series of tests with the Port Authority.

The beacon, which is the top section of the 758-ton spire, contains 288 50-watt LED modules that produce 288,000 lumens that will enable the spire to be visible up to 50 miles on a clear night, according to the Port Authority. Iron workers installed the spire in May. The needlelike top was draped in a huge American flag during its 35-minute ascent. After workers used 60 bolts to fasten the steel pieces, the building became the world's third tallest skyscraper. Only the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, at 2,717 feet, and the Mecca Royal Hotel Clock Tower in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, at 1,972 feet, are taller. A committee of architects recognized as the arbiters on world building heights was meeting Friday in Chicago to decide whether a design change affecting the skyscraper's 408-foot needle disqualifies it from being counted, according to The Associated Press. Disqualification would deny the tower the title as the nation's tallest. Some experts dispute whether the spire is actually an antenna -- a crucial distinction in measuring the building's height.

Without the spire, it would be shorter than the Willis Tower in Chicago, which stands at 1,451 feet and currently has the title of tallest building in the United States, not including its own antennas. The final installation of the spire evoked strong emotions. "The light represents all the souls that were lost" on 9/11, Keene said. Battery Park City resident Ruth Moscovitch, 66, whose window faces 1 World Trade, said, "It's very moving. You can't detach yourself from it. We watched the building go up. Finally we have rebuilt."