

Taking Names

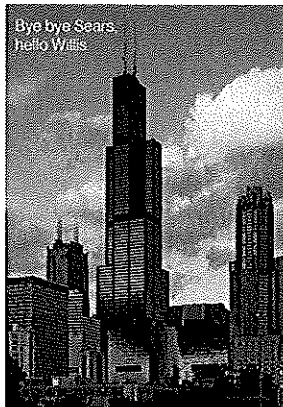
Call it the Sears Tower or Big Willie, it's OK by the Willis Group's Joseph Plumeri.

WHERE I GREW UP, in Trenton, New Jersey, a nickname was a sign of respect, of belonging. It was a good thing.

I grew up in an Italian neighborhood. My friends called me Joey. Nobody called me Joseph except our parish priest and my mother when she was angry at me. But I didn't care what they called me because as long as I had a nickname, that meant they knew me. It meant I was a part of the neighborhood.

People here care a lot about names; they are a source of pride and identity, and longstanding ones represent years of tradition. Just think of Wrigley Field and Comiskey Park (which a lot of people call "The Cell" now, but for some, it will always be Comiskey). Those titles are important to people.

When Willis Group announced we were moving 500 of our associates into the Sears Tower and renaming



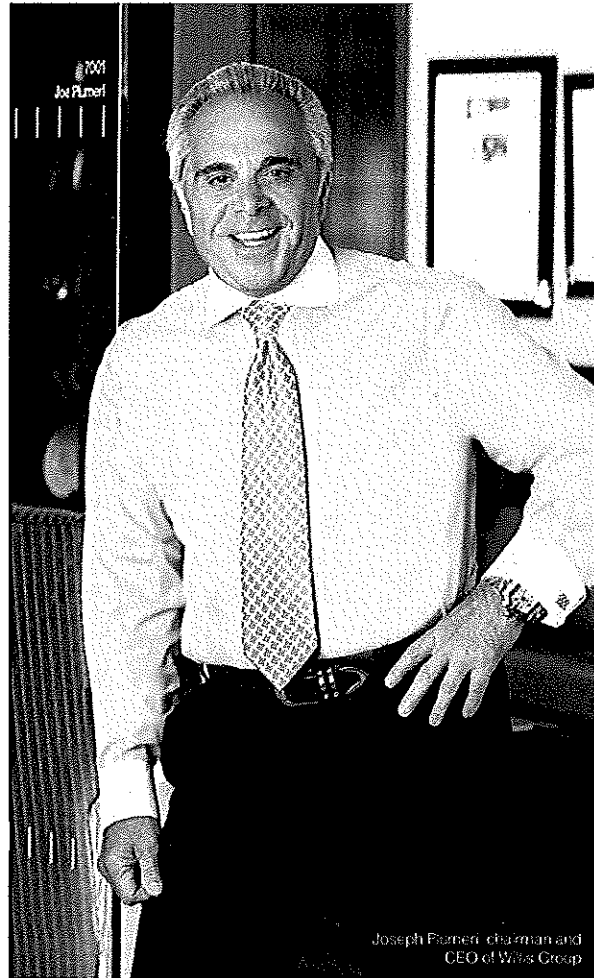
the place Willis Tower, I got a few e-mails. Not all of them were flattering; some were pretty creative, even funny. More than one person asked the question, "Whatchoo talkin' 'bout, Willis?"

Some people will always call Chicago's tallest building Sears Tower. That's OK. I don't begrudge them.

For the record, we're a global insurance broker and our clients, businesses of all sizes, are the buyers of insurance. A lot of people think we're British. Our roots are in England—Henry Willis founded this company in London in 1828—but with our global network, we now serve 190 countries.

Willis has been in Chicago on LaSalle Street since 1885. We still have an office there, but when we acquired another broker last year (HRH) we inherited their two offices in Chicago, along with offices in Lombard and Oak Brook. It didn't make sense to have our people spread out like that. Ultimately, we found that the Sears Tower—the premier business address in The Loop—offered us everything we wanted and more. The more, in this case, being the naming rights to the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere.

What a great branding opportunity! Not only is it great for Willis, it's great for Chicago. We're making an investment in the city, because



Joseph Plumeri, chairman and CEO of Willis Group

we believe in Chicago. By having a global company like Willis call Chicago home, and by bringing more jobs into the city (we plan to add 200 more in the next few years), we're doing our part to enhance the city's growing reputation as a major financial hub and international business center. And that's a good thing.

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them. It's those kind of traditions—and people's loyalty to them—that make Chicago the great town that it is.

I guess we'll know we're really accepted here when Chicagoans give us a nickname, just like we all had in my old neighborhood. In fact, somebody wrote me and suggested that people start calling Willis Tower "The Big Willie." I kind of like that. #MA