

Tony Bennett sang, but the star was the Indiana Roof

By JOHN R. O'NEILL
STAR STAFF WRITER

They say you can't go home again, but Alice Hendricks did. Friday night she returned to the reborn Indiana Roof Ballroom, which she managed for 18 years, for the official reopening of the landmark.

"Here we go again," Mrs. Hendricks said as she and her husband, Al, stepped from the elevator onto the sixth floor of the Indiana Repertory Theatre.

"We just couldn't stay away," she said, greeting two girls who were checking coats.

Neither could about 500 others invited for cocktails, dinner and dancing.

"My first love is the Roof Ballroom," said Margaret Hansen-Kahn, attending with her husband, Alexander J. Kahn. "It's just gorgeous."

Mrs. Kahn works for Cincinnati Floor Co. of Indianapolis, which refinished the dance floor. Made of curved maple strips, it cost \$100,000 when new.

"I hope they have a lot of public dancing," said C.M. Tolson, who had danced there before with his wife, Martha.

The Kahns and the Tolsons were on the floor when the Al Cobine Orchestra played *In the Mood* to kick off festivities.

Tony Bennett, joined by the Nylons, a harmonizing Canadian quartet, were the main attractions after dinner, but the ballroom was the star.

On opening night in 1927, admission was 75 cents for "ladies" and \$1 for "gentlemen." It started as the Indiana Ballroom, then was changed to Indiana Roof in the '30s because it took less advertising space, Mrs. Hendricks said.

Friday night's gala was \$100 a plate, raising more than \$40,000 for the repertory theater.

In the early years, many couples met and courted beneath the 143 electric stars shining in the sky of the domed ceiling. The Spanish village facade, complete

with balconies, windows, doorways and tiled roofs, surrounded a dance floor where thousands flocked to hear Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Fats Waller, Benny Goodman and many others.

Bob Norman was among those others. The former leader of Bob Norman and his Orchestra said he spent some of his best times at the Roof from the early '50s to the mid-'60s. He and his wife, Mary Jane, were invited back for the reopening by Mrs. Hendricks, who was manager from 1940 to 1958.

"This was by far the finest place that we played," he said, and they played it 200 times. "It's great to come back and see it as it was."

The doors closed in 1971 as dancing drew smaller crowds, and other events found new homes. In 1985, Melvin Simon & Associates announced restoration plans and threw a New Year's Eve party, a sign of better times.

In the 11 months since, workers have scrubbed, repainted, replaced, repaired and restored. New sound and lighting systems also were installed.

"We wanted to maintain the historical integrity of the building," said Dennis W. Mannina, construction manager, as he stood on a balcony overlooking the results.

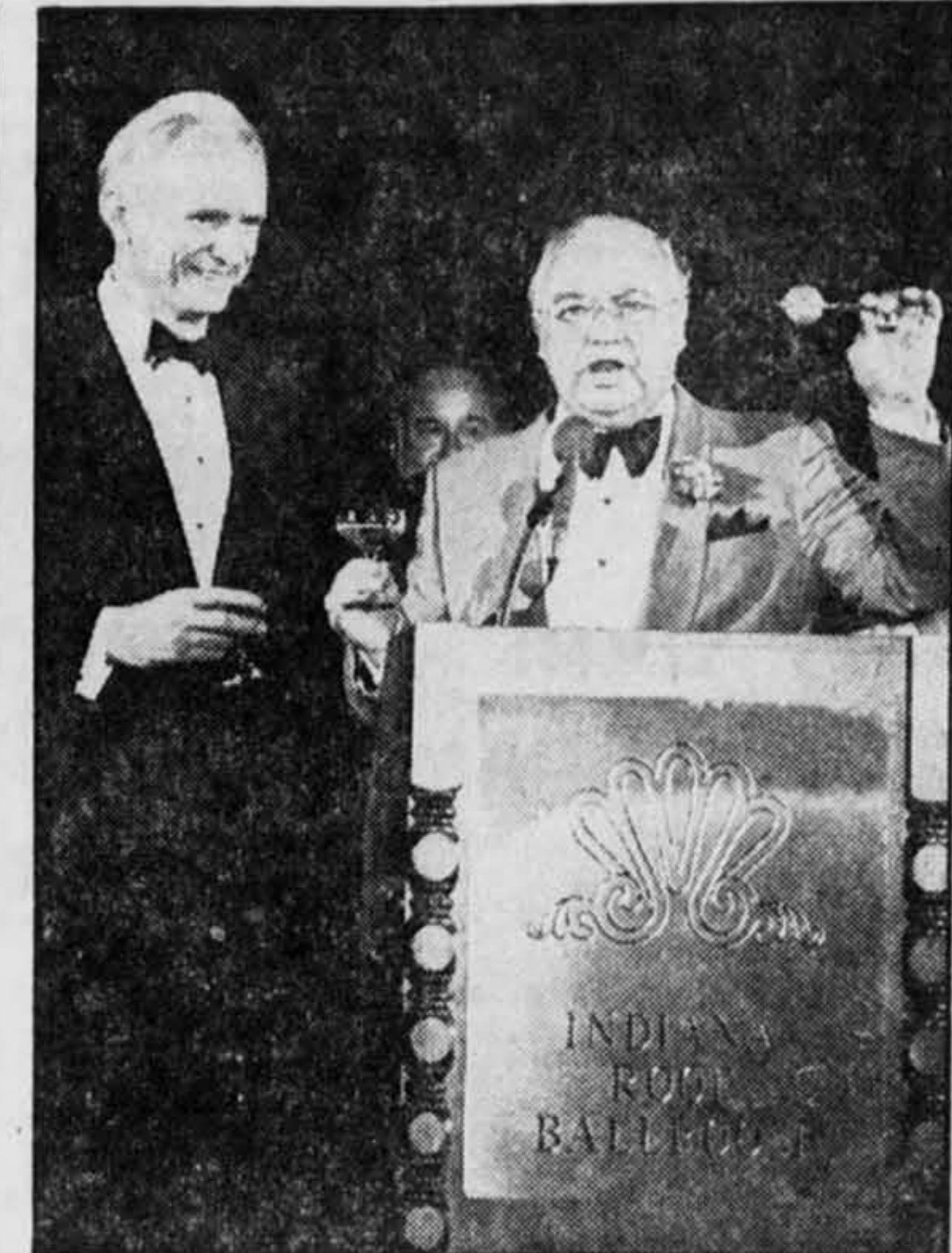
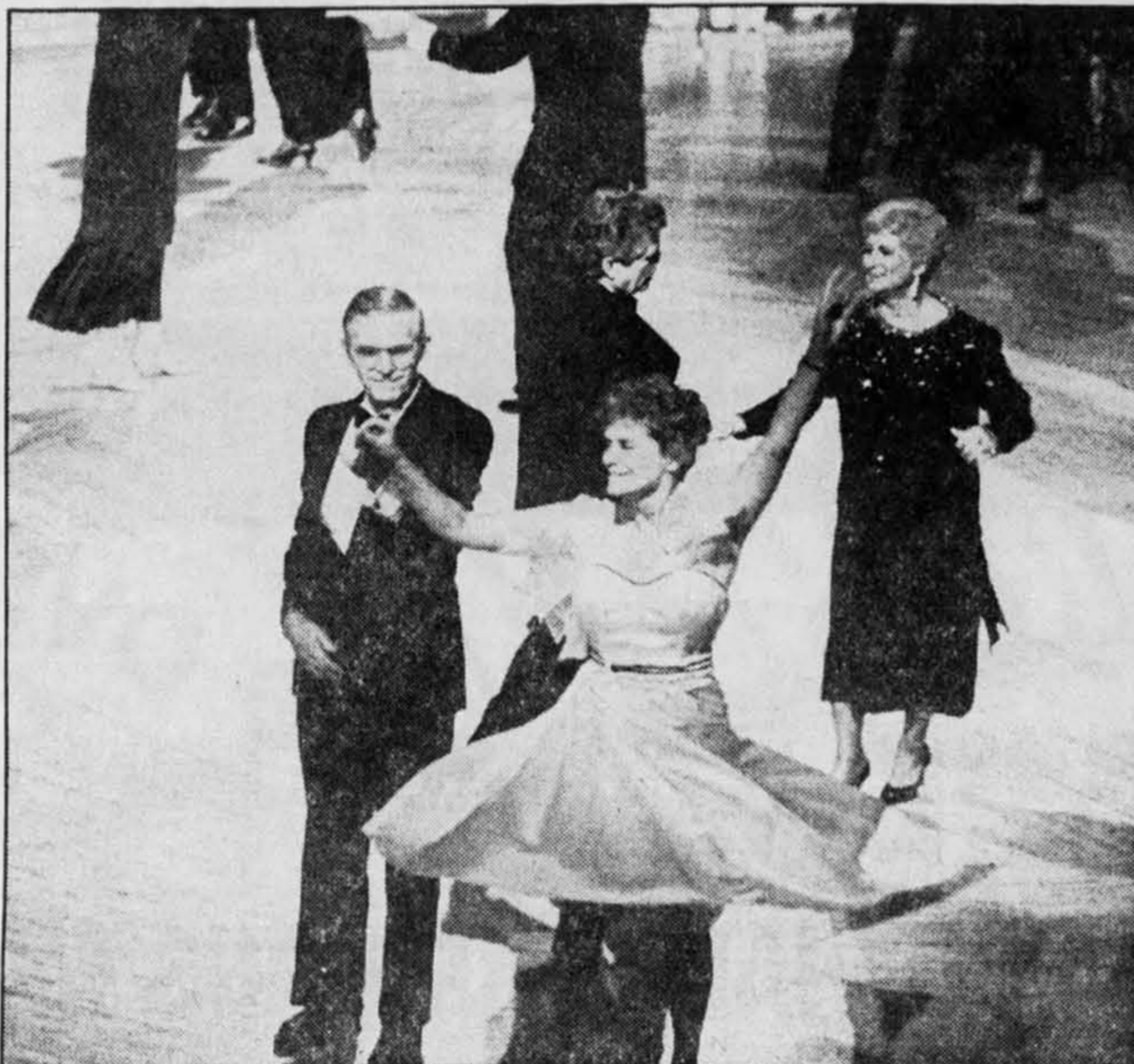
Businessmen from Embassy Suites next door are expected to use the Roof often. Groups from other downtown hotels already have booked events, said Bruce W. Highberg, ballroom manager. About 75 dates are filled next year, he said, including four high school proms.

Many of those students may be dancing where their parents and grandparents did; spanning that generation gap will help the Roof be successful again.

"I think it will, I really think it will," said Lillian Booker of the Indianapolis Jazz Club. "It's just as it was when we were young and danced the night away."



Janet May watches the crowd from a balcony during a lull in the music. Her husband, Phil, is a trumpet player in the band.



Couples took the floor (left) to usher in the ballroom's new era. Later, Larry A. Conrad (above, right) of Melvin Simon & Associates presented Mayor William H. Hudnut with a key to the ballroom.