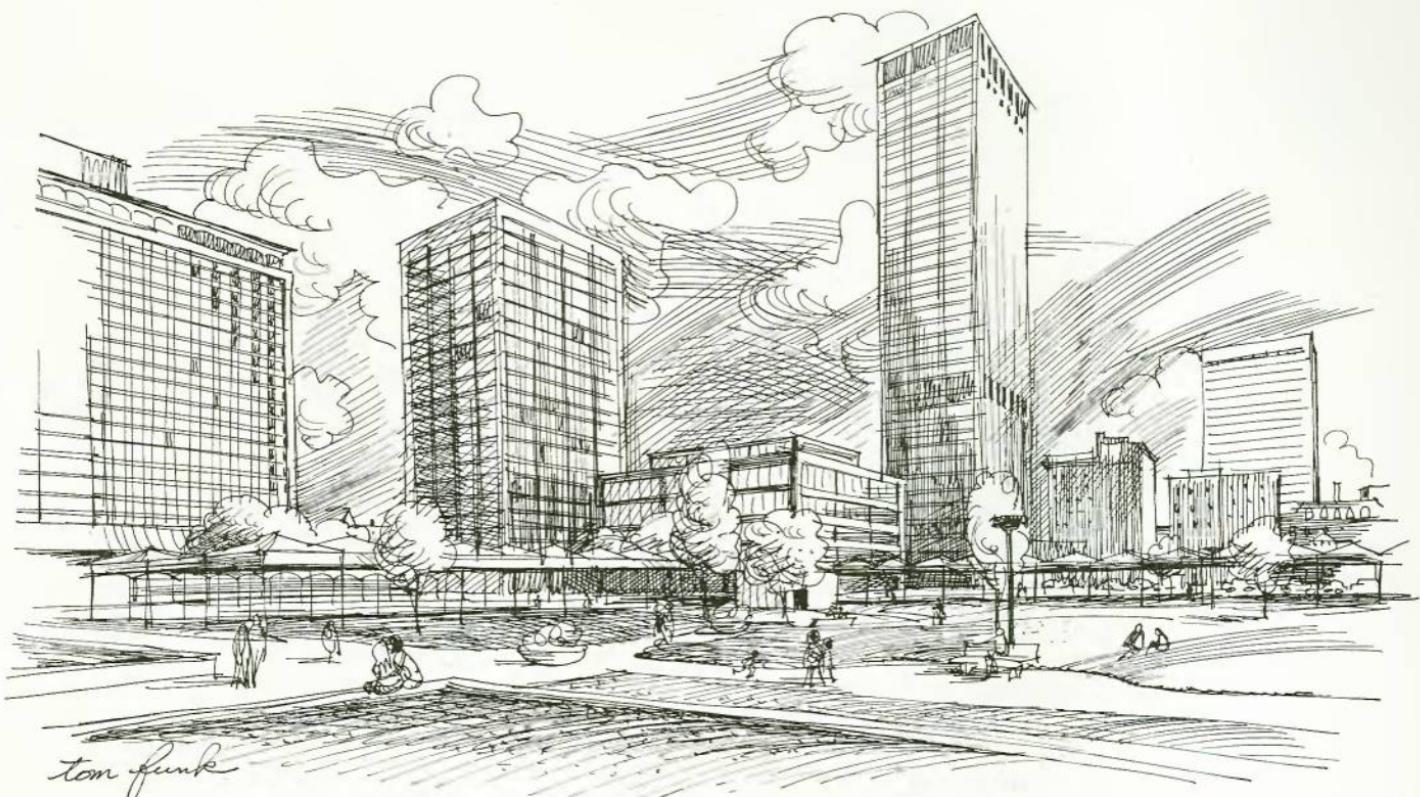


••• PROFILES •••

CITY IN TRANSITION



THERE are a few cities in this country that one might think of as prima-facie likable, and Louisville is one of them. Louisville, which lies in the north-central part of Kentucky, up against the Indiana border, is likely to strike the casual visitor as a place of tolerance, of intelligence and common sense, of lush green summertime parks and gently rolling terrain. The visitor also might get the idea that its citizens somehow feel it their duty to press upon a stranger, if the stranger shows the least interest in determining how it is to live there, the information that they like Louisville because it is just a good place in which to live, work, and play.

The natives' boosting is not fulsome, as it is in some other places. They do not bombard one with statistics about the median income, the climate, the quality of the schools. Rather, they self-confidently extend an implicit invitation to stay for a while and see for oneself why Louisville is such a nice place. It is not at all unusual to hear, in the course of a day of asking questions about Louisville, four or five of those who are prominent in the city's affairs recall the case of some middle-management executive of a national firm who was sent to the city for a tour of duty in the branch office and who,

when the time came for a promotion to the skyscrapers of New York, balked at the change and decided to stay on in Louisville.

When asked to explain their enchantment with the place, those who boost Louisville tend to dwell on the fact that the city is, in their view, "of manageable size." An estimate made by the Louisville Chamber of Commerce in April, 1973, showed that the city's metropolitan area—which includes Jefferson, Bullitt, and Oldham Counties, in Kentucky, and Clark and Floyd Counties, across the Ohio River in Indiana—contained 889,600 persons; that Jefferson County, which encompasses the city, had 713,300 of these; and that within the city limits of Louisville the population was 347,800. The boosters are well aware of the apparent ungovernability of some of the larger cities of the nation, and they express satisfaction over the fact that Louisville is not one of those cities. When they speak of larger cities, they are not confining themselves to places like New York and Chicago and Los Angeles; in recent years they have seemed preoccupied, to a degree that might be called defensive, by comparisons with Atlanta. They like to point out that they think the bloom is off the capital city of Georgia. One Louisvillian

gave expression to this thought not long ago by saying, "There's a fair amount of opinion here that Atlanta's no longer a good place to live. Everything's new, and it's doubled in size, and by comparison Louisville's a very attractive place to live."

To some Louisvillians, though, the claims of manageability and attractiveness have been coverups for a historical tendency of the city to engage in complacency. Louisville's inclination, as some of them have more bluntly put it, has been toward pure laziness. However that may be, change has come slowly to Louisville. One of those blunter citizens—a young man who a few years ago started an underground newspaper, which has since died—recently observed, "Everything comes later in Louisville. If an idea happens on the East Coast, you can look for it in Louisville two years later." Not everyone in Louisville would agree with these charges, of course, and even those who would are likely to point out that the city's complacency has had some positive results. To some extent because of complacency, Louisville took little part in the nationwide boom in construction and destruction that accompanied the big urban-renewal and interstate-highway programs of the fifties and early sixties, and as a consequence

neighborhoods have not been greatly disrupted and there is a good deal of older but still graceful housing available, at moderate cost, inside the city limits. Radicalism and violence have not flourished in Louisville to any appreciable extent, there have been no recent political scandals, and conflicts between the generations seem to have been minimal. The reasons behind all this might well be complacency and laziness, but one result might also be that Louisville has managed to preserve itself as an attractive town.

It is possible to walk, or even drive, around Louisville and absorb a sense of the niceness of the place. A lot of it comes from the Ohio River, on which Louisville was founded, in 1778, by George Rogers Clark. Clark built a fort on an island above the Falls of the Ohio, a twenty-six-foot drop in the river, along three miles of rapids, which had frustrated earlier scouting parties. Later that same year, Clark moved his base to a spot on the mainland close to what is now downtown Louisville, and in 1780 the Virginia Legislature, which then had jurisdiction over the area, established "the Town of Louisville at the Falls of the Ohio," naming the place for King Louis XVI. In 1828, Louisville was incorporated as a city, this time as part of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Throughout its early years, the community was utterly dependent upon the river as a source of trade and settlers, and little time was wasted in trying to do something about the Falls of the Ohio. In 1830, a canal was built around the rapids, with a lock at the lower end, and some shallow-draft shipping was able to continue down the river. Engineers kept working at the problem, and in 1930 they completed a project called the McAlpine Locks and Dam, also a hydroelectric system, which is an integral part of the Army Corps of Engineers system of locks and dams that allow shipping to negotiate the six-hundred-and-forty-foot drop from Pittsburgh to the Ohio's con-

vergence with the Mississippi River, nine hundred and eighty-one miles away. Visitors to Louisville sometimes negotiate their own obstacles of traffic and one-way streets in the hope of seeing the Falls of the Ohio, only to find that the rapids are no longer rapid. The locks and dam have made the Ohio a wide, slow-moving river as it passes Louisville, but it is a busy one, as a lot of Louisvillians are proud to tell you. Some of them will add that it is busier than the Panama Canal. Besides providing commerce and a reason for Louisville's existence, the river has given the city a certain tone, a tone that can also be sensed in other cities that were built on the water—places such as New Orleans, Savannah, St. Louis, and Charleston. There is a feeling of tolerance, which may come from the fact that river and ocean cities have always attracted persons of diverse national and ethnic backgrounds, and there is also a certain feeling of indolence, a feeling that what you don't have time to do today can very well be done tomorrow, or even the next day. The constant presence of the river, itself lazy since the Corps of Engineers got hold of it, seems to enhance that feeling.

In some water cities, notably New Orleans, the sense of laziness seems to go hand in hand with a sense of sensuality, perhaps of depravity—or, to use an expression of more recent vintage, of raunchiness. Such is not the case in modern-day Louisville, at least to the casual observer. The energies that elsewhere might have been spent on depravity seem in Louisville to be used in the serious pursuit of more elevated activities. Douglas Nunn, a former Louisville newspaperman who is now the director of the Urban Studies Center of the University of Louisville, once commented on this in an interview. "This town, from its beginnings, was kind of a loose town," he said. "There was a lot of New Orleans in it. A river town. *Pleasuring* has always been a part of life here. Now, that was a long time ago, but some of it still hangs on, in a different way. You'll see it now in the devotion to cultural activities—the opera, the symphony, the ballet. We've got 'em all. These things give a definite flavor to the town, and they're a primary motivation for an awful lot that goes on here."

Barry Bingham, Sr., another Louisvillian—some of his fellow-citizens



"I see a substantial upswing in the economy by October, but who knows? Maybe it's the Valium talking."

would identify him as the most important one of the past three decades—points out that cultural events in Louisville are not just social functions for the amusement of the upper classes. Bingham, who until his retirement, in 1971, was the publisher and editor of the morning *Courier-Journal* and the evening *Times*, has been an energetic proponent of cultural excellence in the city. In an interview not long ago,

Bingham, who remains as chairman of the board of the newspapers, listed Louisville's accomplishments in the performing arts alone, and it was a list of surprising length for a medium-sized city: the Louisville Ballet Company, the Louisville Orchestra, the Kentucky Opera Association, the Actors Theatre of Louisville, the Louis-

ville Theatrical Association's presentations at the Macauley Theatre, Shakespeare-in-the-Park in the summertime, the Louisville Children's Theatre, the Louisville-Jefferson County Youth Orchestra, the Community Concert Series, the Bach Society, the Chamber Music Society, and the Chamber Singers of Louisville. "And all these things

are really doing so well," he said. "Actors Theatre is an amazing success story. They sold out eighty-eight per cent of their seats, on a season-ticket basis, before the 1973-74 season opened, and then they had to quit, because they wanted to have some seats to sell at the box office! Who ever heard of such a problem as that?" Bingham then made his point that culture in Louisville was not just another charitable exercise for the wealthy. "I don't mean to cite this invidiously about Atlanta," he said, "but it's not like the old Metropolitan Opera season there, where everybody got all dressed up and went for one week out of the year. That was Atlantans' contribution to culture for the year, you know; it was like going to church on Easter Sunday and feeling like you've had religion. The kind of participation that we have here is utterly different. They've got the ticket prices so low that they get lots of young people; they get many more blacks than you ever see at any other kind of cultural enterprise. They get a lot of people who just ordinarily would never see a live performance—people who've been brought up even more on TV than on the movies. This is just the way it should be."

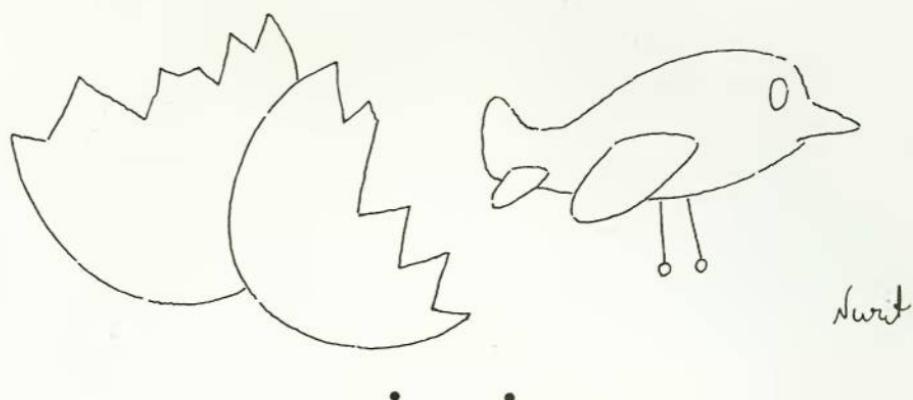
In addition to the cultural and other benefits that accrue to Louisville (or perhaps only appear to accrue) because it is on a river, the city has



"I'm listening. Would you like to finish any unfinished sentences?"

the advantage of being a border city in what many consider a border state. The city is not definitely Northern or Southern, Eastern or Western, and it may be that its residents are thus spared the emotional necessity of being representatives of a region whether they want to be or not. Unlike some of their fellow-Americans to the north and east, Louisvillians are not required to hurry all the time for no clearly discernible reason; unlike those slightly to the west, they feel no need to think of themselves as Middle Americans. And, unlike some of their neighbors from farther south, white Louisvillians—who in 1970 made up seventy-six per cent of the city's population and eighty-eight per cent of Jefferson County's—have been under no great community pressure to champion segregation. Some of those who promote the city tend to capitalize on this lack of clear geographical identity; an advertisement prepared not long ago by the Louisville Development Committee, a group of business leaders interested in the long-range growth of the city, points out, "Many of the nicest things about Louisville are distinctly Southern," but it also notes that the city is geographically closer to Windsor, Ontario, than to Memphis, Tennessee.

Even during the Civil War, Louisville managed to be neither completely Northern nor completely Southern, and today a good number of its citizens seem to take pride in that show of bipartisanship. This may account to some extent for the city's relatively easy confrontation with some of the more recent problems of race relations. In 1956, Louisville's public schools, which had a twenty-seven-per-cent black minority at the time, were desegregated with virtually no trouble; Omer Carmichael, then the superintendent of schools, and a newspaperman named Weldon James later wrote a book about the experience ("The Louisville Story," published in 1957), in which they referred to the change-over as "the quiet heard round the world." In 1964, Benjamin Muse, a former columnist for the *Washington Post*, did a study called "Louisville" for the Southern Regional Council, a pro-integration organization, in Atlanta, which is not easily fooled by rhetoric or tokenism. Muse recounted some of the city's progress in the field of race relations. Kentucky's first black legislator was elected from Louisville in 1934; the city elected its first Negro alderman in 1945; a Negro was acting mayor in 1955; the main library was desegregated in 1948, and its branches



were opened to blacks four years later; black undergraduates were admitted to the University of Louisville in 1951; in 1955—only a year after the nation's school systems were told by the Supreme Court that school desegregation was the law of the land—Louisville's municipal swimming pools were desegregated. Muse commented that the city had made "notable progress in the elimination of race discrimination," and that whatever race prejudice was evident in Louisville "may be said to be contained," for it was "viewed by the community leadership as an evil to be combatted."

Since Muse published his assessment, race relations in Louisville appear to have continued in a direction that could be called progressive—if progress can be defined as an absence of violence and of continuing crisis. Or it just might be that the complacency that some observers assign to Louisville's population in general is affecting the city's black residents as much as its white ones. Louisville's blacks, like the blacks of most cities, seem to be getting the short end of the stick in terms of the quality of housing, the quality of public transportation, and the quality of employment opportunities available to them. The Community Action Commission, which is the anti-poverty agency for Louisville and for Jefferson County, estimated in the spring of 1973 that a little more than eleven per cent of the city's population was "directly affected by poverty," and it was certain that large numbers of those affected were black. But a visitor to Louisville can find little evidence that the blacks, generally, feel a need to protest these conditions in any organized way. The Reverend W. J. Hodge, who is the pastor of Louisville's Fifth Street Baptist Church and the urban-program director of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said not long ago that he thought he knew the reason for the lack of protest. "In Louisville, you know, there was always the feeling

among black folks that 'we're not in the South,'" he said. "And therefore 'we don't have to protest as much.'" That feeling, he said, was self-deluding, but it was still prevalent in Louisville. Some of that feeling came through in Mr. Hodge's own answers to questions about issues facing the black community. When he was asked about black Louisvillians' treatment in the matter of jobs—particularly in the light of a recent boom in downtown building—he replied, "We haven't got around to doing a survey of employment practices and policies." And when he was asked about black political power—just a few days after a mayoral election, as it happened—the N.A.A.C.P. executive said he didn't know what degree of voting power Louisville's blacks had.

Whatever help Louisville gets from being a tolerant border city, or a tolerant border *river* city, it also has the good fortune to have two daily newspapers that are generally regarded by those in the business as far above the average. The jointly owned *Courier-Journal* and *Times* provide their readers not only with news from their own staffs of reporters but also with a solid diet of national and international news. The papers run a variety of opinion columns on their editorial and op-ed pages, and there are what appear to be far more than the average number of letters from readers. Barry Bingham, Jr., who succeeded his father as editor and publisher of the two newspapers, said not long ago that the editorial policy was "to publish virtually every letter we get," the only exceptions being letters that are libellous. The *Times* also publishes, in small type, basic documentary information about the city—the sort of news that a lot of papers nowadays seem to try to ignore. Under "The Help Line," the *Times* publishes the telephone numbers of, among others, the Red Cross; the Salvation Army; HAIR (Help Always in Reach), a counselling service for young people; the Problem Pregnancy and Abor-

tion Counseling Project; Birthright, a counselling service for "women whose pregnancies present problems but who do not want abortions;" Alcoholics Anonymous; the Poison Control Center; and Hotline, a service of the Evangel Tabernacle Church which "helps anyone who has a problem, needs a friend, or wants to talk to someone." "Area News of Record" lists divorces granted and births, and separate lists of real-estate transfers and marriage licenses also appear frequently. "Crime and the Courts" includes traffic- and criminal-court cases. The newspapers are also unusual in their willingness to admit that they occasionally make mistakes. Each edition of the *Courier-Journal* and the *Times* carries, in a box, this announcement:

OMBUDSMAN

If you have a question or complaint regarding news coverage, please contact our Ombudsman's office between 9 A.M. and 5 P.M., Monday through Friday. We established the office to help you with problems requiring the attention of any top-management personnel.

There also are frequent announcements in the papers under the heading "Beg Your Pardon" or "We Were Wrong." The *Courier-Journal* and the *Times*, unlike many other newspapers, are quick to correct errors they have printed, and the "Beg Your Pardon" and "We Were Wrong" columns are sometimes full of corrections of people's addresses, the spelling of their names, what they really said in a speech, and the like. Barry Bingham, Jr., called the column "a necessity," explaining, "I really do believe that the newspaper has to set the record straight. Newspapers are not always right. We make mistakes, and when we make a mistake I think the best thing is just to be graceful about it and say we're sorry, we made a mistake. I think people appreciate somebody who admits he's fallible. For a newspaper publisher to sit in his office and arrogantly say, 'Everything we publish is right,' even if he knows it's wrong, is just being damned foolish." Last January, a column titled "In All Fairness," devoted to criticism of the media, began appearing on the editorial page. Bingham said of this venture, "I think people are interested in hearing criticism of the people who do the criticizing. We do an awful lot of criticizing on our opinion page, and to me it only makes sense for somebody to be able to open to that page occasionally and find somebody saying, 'Well, they aren't so perfect, either.'"

The Louisville newspapers are local-

RURAL ROUTE

The stars come out to graze, wild-eyed in the new dark.
The dead squeeze close together,
Strung out like a seam of coal through the raw earth.
I smell its fragrance, I touch its velvet walls.

The willow lets down her hooks.
On the holly leaves, the smears of light
Retrench and repeat their alphabet,
That slow code. The boxwood leans out to take it on,

Quicker, but still unbroken.
Inside the house, in one room, a twelve-year-old
Looks at his face on the windowpane, a face
Once mine, the same twitch to the eye.

The willow flashes her hooks.
I step closer. Azalea branches and box snags
Drag at my pants leg, twenty-six years gone by.
I enter the wedge of light.

And the face stays on the window, the eyes unchanged.
It still looks in, still unaware of the willow, the boxwood,
Or any light on any leaf. Or me.
Somewhere a tire squeals, somewhere a door is shut twice.

And what it sees is what it has always seen:
Stuffed birds on a desk top, a deer head
On the wall, and all the small things we used once
To push the twelve rings of the night back.

How silly! And still they call us
Across the decades—fog horns,
Not destinations: outposts of things to avoid, reefs
To steer clear of, pockets of great abandon.

I back off, and the face stays.
I leave the back yard, and the front yard, and the face stays.
I am back on the west coast, in my studio,
My wife and my son asleep, and the face stays.

—CHARLES WRIGHT

• •
did you have in mind when you printed that?"'

IT is not at all difficult for a visitor to Louisville to conclude—after reading its newspapers and reviewing its record on human relations; after hearing of its citizens' warmth and graciousness at Kentucky Derby time and experiencing some of it even when the horses are not running; after driving and walking through the parks and along the accessible stretches of the Ohio River—that it really is a nice place in which to live, work, and play. But there are some Louisvillians—not critics of the city but interested citizens who have chosen to stay and make their fortunes there, and have a considerable amount of time, energy, and money invested in the place—who in recent years have felt that the nice ness is a bit too nice; that perhaps it



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has been, all these years, a screen for laziness; and that this laziness is a great obstacle to Louisville's gaining her rightful place among American cities.

When these citizens were asked, only a few years ago, about their hopes for the city, many of them seemed despondent. They feared then that Louisville, in sitting back and being content with being nice, had lost whatever initiative and momentum it had, and that its ability to remain a nice city was thus endangered. One of these Louisvillians, a young executive named H. Wendell Cherry, summed it all up by declaring that his city had fallen victim to an "incredible inertia," which manifested itself in several ways, one of them being that a lot of citizens were going around saying they were glad that not much was happening in Louisville. Cherry said at the time, "You hear people say, 'I don't know whether I want Louisville to be too big.' They make it sound like it's a great big place already, but the truth is that the Kentucky Derby is the only damn thing we've got in this city, and that lasts two minutes and a fraction, once a year."

Back then, a number of Louisville's leaders were expressing the fear that there was one respect in which the city was already too big and that that was in its dependence upon blue-collar industry. Some of the other leaders rejoiced in this (a typical Chamber of Commerce publication in the early seventies heralded the area as the "Number One Industrial Complex of the Southeast"), but more recently they have seen it as a possible impediment to the area's progress, particularly as the public generally has become more aware of environmental issues. There are about a thousand manufacturing firms in the Louisville area, and among these, according to the Kentucky Department of Commerce, are the world's largest plants producing electrical appliances, neoprene, bathroom fixtures, and air-filtration equipment. Louisville is also the world's largest producer of bourbon whiskey, and a major center for the manufacture of other distilled spirits, tobacco products, paint, and wood products. Among the largest local industries are General Electric, whose Appliance Park covers nine hundred and forty-two acres and employs twenty-two

thousand workers; the Ford Motor Company, which operates one of the largest assembly plants in the world there, and employs four thousand workers in a fifty-seven-acre complex, all under one roof; International Harvester, which employs about sixty-two hundred; the Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation, with about six thousand; and such firms as Philip Morris, E. I. du Pont de Nemours, Lorillard, American Standard, and B. F. Goodrich.

What bothered those who were worried a few years ago about the importance of industry was not that the entire area was dependent on a single product or skill (it wasn't; Louisvillians uttered small prayers of thanks for their diversified industry when they heard of what happened in Seattle, among other places, when the aerospace industry fell victim to a cutback in contracts) but that blue-collar industry and blue-collar workers were unlikely to make the sort of contributions to the community that some of the community's leaders thought ought to be made. Blue-collar industry, they reasoned, meant an orientation toward suburbia rather than the central city,



"As if we didn't have enough to contend with these days, it looks like another round with Old Pendleton and his seven-year itch."

and many of these leaders were worried about what was happening to the center of Louisville. The downtown section was deteriorating, and people were expressing fear that it would continue to deteriorate, with the result that Louisville would become just an urban sprawl. With no clearly defined center, it would inevitably lose a lot of its niceness.

Any discussion of Louisville's future a few years ago included a discussion of its downtown and what was happening to it, and any discussion of

downtown included a discussion of the Ohio River. Louisville, after all, was born on the south bank of the river. Its premier thoroughfare—the one that the early Louisvillians decided to name Main Street—was fast by the river. The Ohio was Louisville's reason for existence; as Barry Bingham, Sr., put it not long ago, the river "was why Louisville *became* a city in the first place." But through the years Louisville had allowed its attention to drift away from the river. The Ohio was a bit difficult to get to and admire any-

way, because there were railroad tracks alongside it from about 1880 on and later the riverbank seemed to be the obvious place to run an interstate highway. What land was left over attracted huge piles of crushed gravel, storage tanks, and automobile junk yards, and the result was a waterfront that was far from scenic. Louisville's waterfront could best be viewed by crossing a bridge to the Indiana side and looking back, but even then there was not much to see. The Louisville skyline, with no tall buildings or other structures to catch the eye, seemed to merge into the conglomeration of industries at the water's edge.

Businesses that needed space in downtown Louisville settled, over the years, not on Main Street but on streets farther south of the river—particularly Broadway, six blocks from the water. An example of this sort of migration could be seen in the city's newspapers, which, like most such publications, have found it necessary to keep their offices as close to the center of downtown activity as possible. The *Courier-Journal* and the *Times*, which had had their headquarters in a building within four blocks of the river, decided even before the end of the Second World War that expansion was needed, and in 1947 the newspapers built a new home on Broadway. A number of other businesses found that they didn't need downtown addresses at all. They headed for suburbia, where a large part of the population was also heading, and which was easy to head for, since several multi-lane highways had just been built. A few settled somewhat

tentatively on Fourth Street, which runs at right angles to Main, Broadway, and the waterfront, and which was the site of a number of retail businesses—places where office workers might shop on their lunch hours and where people transferring from one bus to another might spend a few minutes and a few dollars. But even Fourth Street was considered a potential disaster area by some, and a lot of people were close to giving up on the future of downtown Louisville altogether. Then, in 1964, an energetic developer and con-

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tractor named Al J. Schneider took what everyone considers a great gamble and started erecting a few new buildings on Broadway—a bank building, the first new office building to be constructed in some time, and a hotel. For a while, in the fifties and sixties, it looked as if Broadway would become the new downtown for Louisville, and a rather tame and undeveloped one at that.

In the meantime, Main Street and the riverfront continued to deteriorate. Four years ago, a stroller on one block of Main would find parking lots that offered space for twenty-five cents an hour; several sturdy-looking and architecturally attractive but vacant buildings of the small-warehouse type; another structure, handsome but empty, with "Board of Trade" engraved over its door; a school-supply company; a firm that sold pumps; a store specializing in restaurant and office supplies; a firm that manufactured displays; a store selling furniture, fabrics, and floor coverings; and the Louisville Credit Men's Association, which occupied a building that, according to a State Department of Highways marker outside, was designed and built in 1837 by Gideon Shryock, "the father of Greek revival architecture in Kentucky." If the stroller took his stroll in the early evening, he would see very few pedestrians and very few vehicles. Except for Broadway and the portion of Fourth Street where the hotels and department stores were, downtown Louisville was pretty much deserted after the evening rush hour.

Despite all the indications that Louisville was destined to become little more than the unexciting center of an urban sprawl, there were a number of Louisvillians who, a few years ago, kept insisting that it need not be that way at all. Louisville could and should support a downtown, they argued, and the downtown could and should be turned around and pointed back toward the river. Those arguments, by and large, came not from the recognized leaders of the city but from a number of younger persons who had recently settled in Louisville, made a lot of money, and seemed to be on the verge of making a lot more. People around Louisville called them "the young movers and shakers." Among them were a number of businessmen who had got together and bought a basketball team—the Kentucky Colonels, of the American Basketball Association—and installed it in Louisville.

One of the co-owners of the Colonels at that time was Cherry, the

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to his friends



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young executive who had decried Louisville's "incredible inertia." Cherry, who is now thirty-eight years old, is a lawyer and the president and co-founder of Humana, which until last January was called Extendicare, an investor-owned firm that builds and manages hospitals, using what a company brochure calls "sound business principles," including computer technology, to improve the hospitals' efficiency and their delivery of services, and to turn them into profitable institutions. The firm was founded in 1961, and as of last year it was operating forty-seven hospitals, with 4,554 beds, in a dozen states, and had annual revenues of a hundred and seven million dollars. It was Cherry's contention, four years ago, that Louisville badly needed "something it can focus on," and that the acquisition of a home-town basketball team helped a lot in this respect. "Sure, those of us who own the team might make some money on it," he told a visitor back then. "But this city has to have something it can call its own. Sports per se add minimally to the quality of living in a city, but they can add a great deal emotionally. They can add great pride. Somewhere along the line, this city lost pride in itself. And the effort now must be to reestablish pride." Cherry looked out the window of his office, which was situated in one of the buildings Al Schneider had erected on Broadway. "Louisville had some pride when it was turned toward the river," he continued. "Then it turned away. And the thing now is to turn it back. It's going to be a hard job. The river is the only thing of natural beauty here. Of course, it may be polluted, but it's still pretty. We've planned ourselves silly for a decade. The time has come, I think, to do some work."

At the time Cherry made those comments, there was very little work being done, and a lot of Louisvillians doubted whether it would ever be done. But since then the rebirth has taken place. Louisville has a new downtown. Three blocks of Fourth Street have been turned into a pleasant pedestrian mall that makes shopping convenient and perhaps even a little exciting. Anyone who takes a look at Louisville's skyline from across the river, in Indiana, sees a number of new buildings, the tallest of them forty stories high. But one need not cross the river at all to appreciate Louisville's waterfront, for the city has indeed been turned around and pointed back toward the Ohio. There is a handsome promenade on the Kentucky side, where one can

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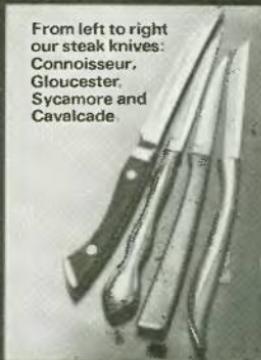
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stare out over the wide, placid river, and when one tires of that one may gaze at a new ice-skating rink alongside the river, or, in the summer, at fountains and pools. The tall buildings, most of them put up by banks that not long ago were uncertain about the future of downtown Louisville, stand close to the water, and more buildings, including apartment houses and condominiums, are being planned for the waterfront. Property on Main Street is becoming valuable again, and the street itself is now lively at night. The handsome building that Gideon Shryock put up in 1837 has been turned into part of a new home for the Actors Theatre. And Cherry himself now has an office on the waterfront, high in a bank building, with a superb view of the water. Louisville has regained its pride, or a good deal of it, if pride can be measured in glass, steel, and concrete.

THE rejuvenation of Louisville's downtown area did not come either easily or quickly, and although the physical evidence that it has occurred has been standing there on the skyline and on the waterfront for many months now, there are some Louisvillians who say they must still engage in mental pinching to convince themselves that it is not just some architect's rendition they saw in the newspapers. Citizens have been seeing architects' renditions for many years, but until now nothing seemed to happen with them.

The proposals had been coming out since the nineteen-twenties, but the serious planning started around 1960, when the Reynolds Metals Development Corporation retained the planning firm of Doxiadis Associates—which has worked on the Northern Ohio Urban Systems Project, encompassing the cities of Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Toledo—to devise a new life for the waterfront. At about the same time, city officials became interested in the possibilities of public development of the waterfront, and established an Urban Renewal Commission to oversee the assembling of land parcels. The Doxiadis planners came up with the idea of building apartment houses and a marina near the foot of Fourth Street, but that plan was abandoned for a number of reasons. The idea of doing something with the waterfront, though, was by this time firmly entrenched in Louisvillians' minds, and although Reynolds Metals eventually terminated its connection with the project, a number of people went about energetically promoting the development. No one was more energetic, according to local

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accounts, than a man named Archibald P. Cochran, who died a few years ago, in his seventies. Cochran, a former Louisville industrialist, had become in retirement a tireless worker for civic good. He was enthusiastic about doing something with the waterfront, so in 1964 Louisville's mayor at the time, the late William O. Cowger, named him Riverfront Expediter and gave him the assignment of turning some of the planning into reality. Cochran worked hard at his job during the middle and late sixties, but his efforts gained little backing from Louisville's traditional leadership—its power structure. The complaint that some have about the power structure, not only in relation to the waterfront but also in relation to almost everything else that has or has not gone on in Louisville, is not that the behind-the-scenes leaders do the wrong thing but that they do nothing at all.

An explanation of Louisville's power structure that a visitor gets repeatedly when asking questions about Louisville is that it is so fragmented that it yields little power. The people with power, some say, include, on the one hand, the current leaders of the old, rich families and, on the other, the new technocrats—the "young movers and shakers," like Cherry. The old, rich families, according to the explanation, are interested primarily in keeping their money, and the new movers and shakers are interested primarily in making more of it, and as a result there is nothing that could properly be called a downtown élite that tries to run the city. Almost by default, then, a lot of Louisville's pool of community power seems to have gone to the city's banks—which, after all, hold the resources of both groups—and to the people who run the city's communications businesses, particularly to Barry Bingham, Sr., who retains a lot of power despite his official retirement as editor and publisher of the newspapers.

A few years ago, Bingham's evening newspaper published a detailed study of Louisville's power structure, and it named names, including Bingham's own. Geoffrey Brown, a reporter for the Louisville *Times*, spent two and a half months studying power, and in February of 1971 he published his findings. "Nobody really runs Louisville," he concluded. "Louisville does have an élite. But it is not a handful of potentates. It is a sprawling mass in which the business and the family are more important, generally, than the individual. Whoever is head of the company or the family this year will be

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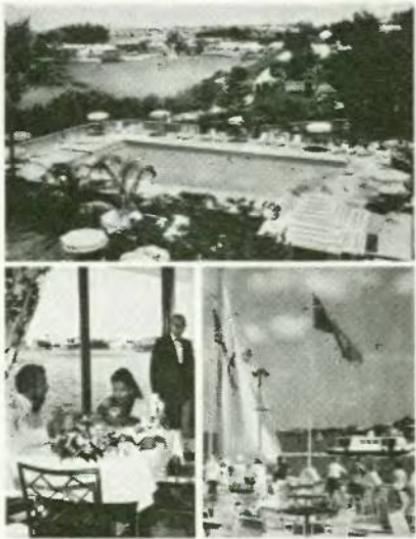
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courted and flattered and asked to contribute and will have some say in running Louisville. But because the power structure is broad and fragmented, his say may not carry much weight." As evidence of the élite's fragmentation, Brown noted that he had asked eleven leaders to list the ten persons they considered most powerful in Louisville, and that the eleven had come up with sixty-eight names. The two mentioned most often were B. Hudson Milner, the president of the Louisville Gas & Electric Company, and Barry Bingham, Sr. Brown found that the heads of the area's biggest industries—General Electric, Ford, International Harvester, and so on—were not thought of as powerful people, because they were "outside-based" and "their decisions on local civic involvement often are made out of town." The city's five major banks "are where the power is," Brown said, and he explained, "Because of the dispersal of wealth here, the places where it tends to get stored... are the most powerful force in town when they choose to work together." But Brown also noted that the banks held to a "long-time timidity" about getting involved in civic matters.

The fragmentation of the power structure, coupled with the reluctance of Louisville's banks to take what seemed to them to be risks, kept a lot of the downtown and waterfront planning on the drawing board through the middle and late sixties, to the dismay of people like Cochran and Schneider. The latter had enjoyed some success with his buildings on Broadway, and he now was trying to convince other Louisvillians that the waterfront was the obvious next candidate for development. As for the people who were doing

the planning, they were convinced that if there couldn't be a marina on the waterfront there ought to be something else that would attract the public. Alongside apartment and office buildings, they proposed, someone should construct a parking garage (everyone thought this would be necessary to attract people to the waterfront in the first place) and some sort of pedestrian platform over the railroad tracks and the interstate highway which would afford people an elevated view of the river. The planners started using the word "belvedere"—an old-

fashioned term, from Italian architecture, for a structure that commands a superior view—to describe their proposed platform. By 1967, the city had established its Riverfront Commission, with Cochran in charge, and an Urban Renewal Commission, whose members included Schneider. Schneider was also a member of the Riverfront Commission, and since he was a developer and contractor by trade, his presence on the two agencies upset a number of Louisvillians, among them editorial writers for the newspapers, who saw a potential conflict of interest. Schneider, a large, voluble man who is given to doodling on restaurant tablecloths with a pencil (the results are likely to be intricate maps of some downtown Louisville of the future), plunged into his work on the commission, and when he found that investors were reluctant to commit themselves to development of the waterfront he developed it, in part, himself by building a hotel. (The garage and the belvedere were built by the city and are publicly owned. Schneider built the hotel, which he operates, on land leased from the city.) Asked not long ago if the newspapers had perhaps been correct when they accused him of conflict of interest, Schneider thought a few moments and replied, "Well, I guess if you come right down to the letter of the law, yes, it was. Arch Cochran and I could have been in serious trouble. When we were on the commission, we carried on as if we owned the damned place. We never asked the mayor anything. When we wanted to do something, we'd just do it, same as we did our own business. Nobody ever complained about it—nobody ever knew about it. And we never even dreamed that we were doing anything wrong."

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Schneider's and Cochran's persistence resulted in the construction of an impressive waterfront complex. Schneider built the Galt House, a twenty-four-story hotel with striking river views from most of its seven hundred and fourteen rooms, and with two revolving restaurants on its top. (When he showed a visitor around the place last winter, Schneider casually observed that this was twice as many revolving restaurants as there were on top of Atlanta's showplace hotel, the



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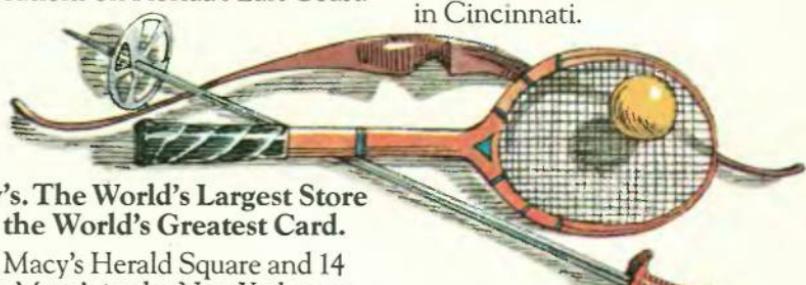
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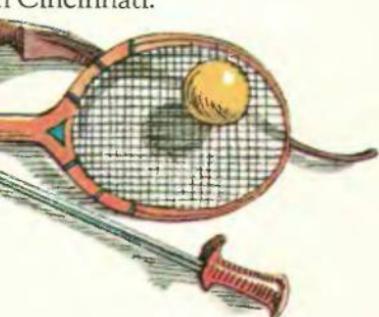


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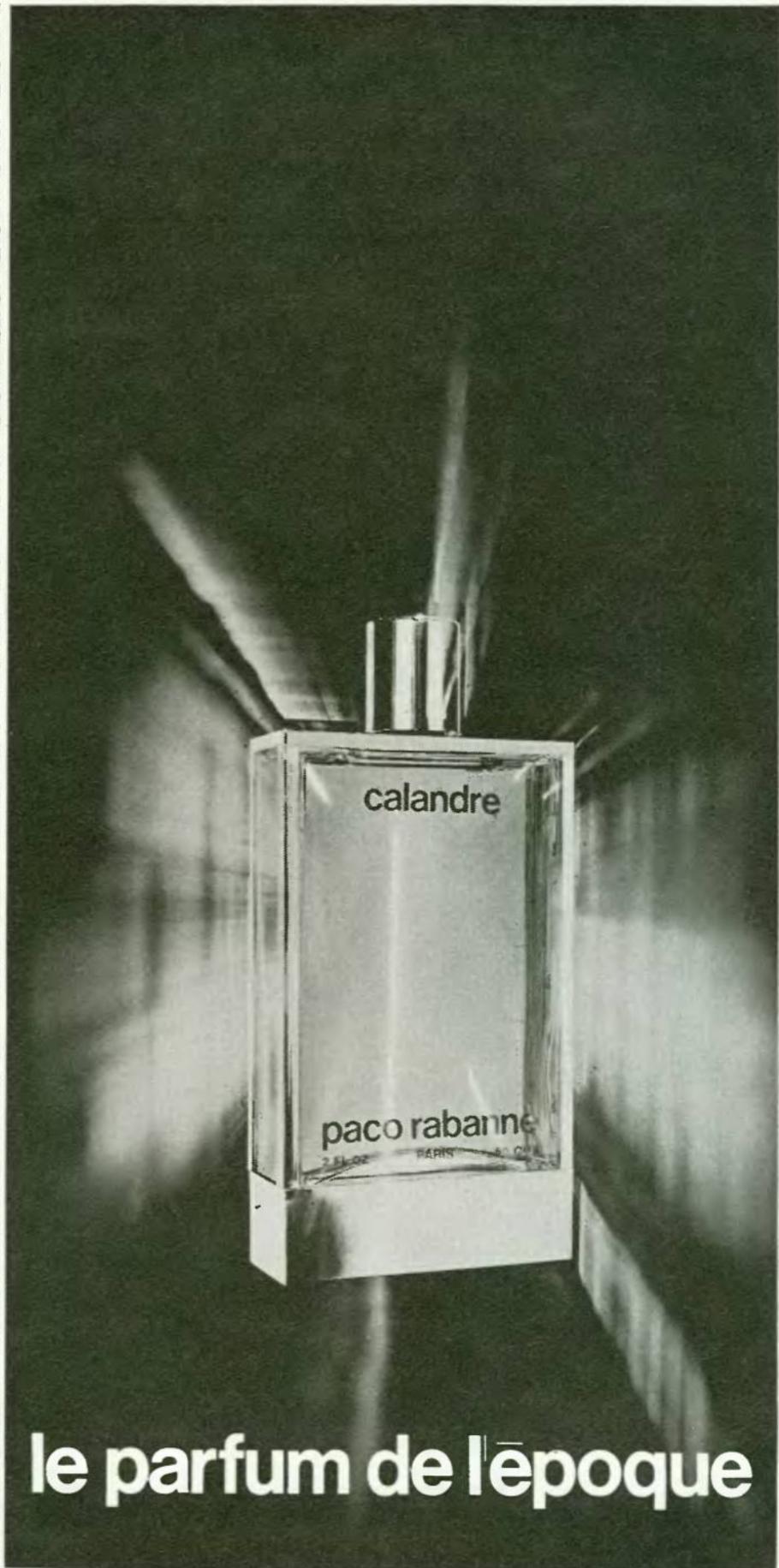


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Regency, and he also noted that he had personally designed the hotel's interior and selected its furnishings, which are something of a conglomeration of decorating styles. "Some of the New York people who come here to write about architecture get pretty upset with what I put into this place," he said. "But I don't care. I picked out what I like.") Beside the hotel is a sixteen-hundred-car garage, and atop the garage and jutting out to the river's edge is the belvedere. It is an attractive structure, and serves as a symbol of Louisville's return to the Ohio. The belvedere and the adjacent plaza take up seven and a half acres, on several levels, and they feature pools and fountains and plenty of room for strolling. One of the pools doubles as an ice rink, and last winter Louisville quickly discovered that it had a lot of citizens who knew how to skate and a lot more who weren't afraid to learn. Since it opened, in late April of 1973, timed to coincide with Derby Week, the belvedere has become a place that a lot of citizens apparently feel is their own—a downtown park, suitable for pleasant loafing, brown-bag lunching, rivergazing, and just walking around. Some citizens have used it for more formal pursuits as well; in the first few weeks after the belvedere was opened, according to *Louisville*, a publication of the Chamber of Commerce, it was the scene of two weddings, a square dance, a yoga session, a church breakfast, and an outdoor religious service.

About the time things started moving on the riverfront project, they started moving in other parts of downtown Louisville as well. In 1967, government and business leaders got together and decided that something ought to be done about the whole downtown area. They also decided to ask for professional help, and engaged a team headed by Gruen Associates, an architectural, planning, and engineering firm that has done research on everything from a new university town in Belgium to what its project book calls a Hamburger Hamlet Addition in Los Angeles, to draw up a proposal. Two years later, the professionals completed their survey and proffered their advice; it was contained in a handsomely produced ninety-four-page document titled "Louisville Center City Development Program" and rich in maps, charts, and elegant typography. The document offered "a program for revitalizing the Center City area of Louisville," and to those citizens who had been deplored Louisville's complacency its major findings seemed to



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hit the bull's-eye. The city's problems "are only partly physical shortcomings," the consultants said. "The more important cause is rooted in attitudes; call it a question of confidence in the future of Center City." Louisville, said the report, needed to change from a regional "service center" into "an urban center of national significance," and the center of the city was "a critical link in this transition." The consultants listed some fifty specific proposals by which, they said, these goals might be accomplished; many of them had to do with transit and parking, the construction of a new exhibition center, a major convention hotel, and a new government center. The most exciting and interesting proposals, though, had to do with what the consultants felt was the absolute need to restore downtown Louisville's friendly relationship with the Ohio River. The city, said the report, had grown toward the south and east, and the result was "a development pattern where, today, Center City is considerably off-center in its urban region." What was most needed, according to the consultants, was the conscious linking of the present spinal column of the downtown area, Fourth Street, to the river, with the riverfront project—just getting under way—serving as the kingpin. The other end of the spine would be Broadway. One way to strengthen the spine, the consultants said, would be by converting Fourth Street into a pedestrian mall. There were handsome maps and line drawings to illustrate the proposed mall, with precise little shrubs here and there, and sophisticated- and satisfied-looking shoppers strolling down it.

When the Gruen Report, as some called it, circulated in Louisville in 1969 and 1970, it became almost a textbook for a few leaders and was almost completely ignored by many, who presumably thought of it as just the latest in the long line of surveys. People had been talking about turning Fourth Street into a pedestrian mall almost as long as they had been talking about developing the riverfront. Back in 1943, a Louisville mayor named Wilson W. Wyatt, Sr., had tried to promote the idea among political and business leaders, with no success. Even after the Gruen Report was published, there was remarkably little enthusiasm in some quarters. B. Hudson Milner, the head of the gas-and-electric company, and one of the few Louisvillians who were universally acknowledged to possess a great deal of power, was asked in 1970 if he had read the report, and he replied, with a smile, "I have gone over

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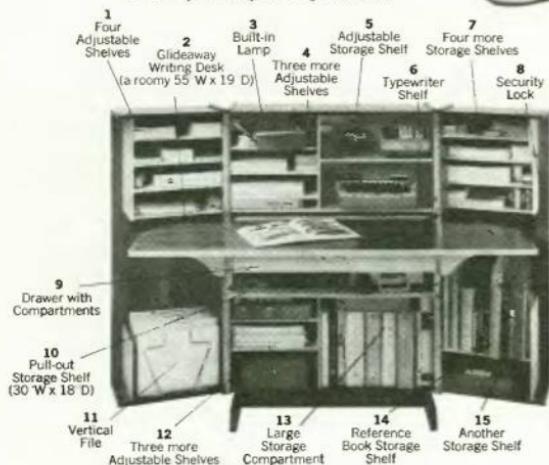
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it almost in the way the judge says he's gone over the record, by which he means he stepped carefully over it on his way to the office."

The person for whom the report became most like holy writ was Leslie J. Barr, now president of the Greater Toledo Corporation, an organization set up to redesign and redevelop downtown Toledo, who at that time was the youthful director of the Louisville Central Area, Inc., a chamber-of-commerce-type organization for firms in the central business district. Barr practically memorized the report as he hurried about the downtown area, buttonholing merchants, bankers, and political leaders and trying to convince them that the city needed a spine. "The question is: Will the *process* of all our planning be the only *product*?" he said to a visitor in the summer of 1970. "In other words, will the plan end up on the shelf? That has probably been the biggest trouble with planning in this city to date." The answer to Barr's question, like the answer to the question of whether the riverfront would ever be developed, is, of course, now in hand. In August of 1973, Fourth Street from Broadway to within two blocks of the river became a pedestrian mall—one that looks almost like the designers' drawings. There are trees, and flower beds, and benches, and places for children to play. The three-block-long plaza, which has been named River City Mall, is architecturally pleasing, comfortable, and an all-round delightful place. People seem to slow down their gait when they enter it, as if they had just stepped from a busy thoroughfare into a pleasant park. A major attraction of the mall, however, is not that it is quiet and pastoral but, rather, that it combines the pedestrian's slower pace with the diversity of dozens of places to stop, shop, stroll, and look. A visitor to the mall is likely to be struck by the differences between it and its counterpart in the suburban shopping centers, many of which try to build some sort of mall arrangement into the spaces between their shops. In the suburban centers, one is aware that the stores have been carefully chosen to provide an atmosphere of "togetherness" (and, probably, to minimize competition for the participating merchants). The River City Mall is a lot like a traditional downtown; it has all of a thriving downtown's heterogeneity, with the advantage that one can cross the street without fear of being hit by a car. Walking along the River City Mall, a visitor finds dime stores, men's and women's clothing shops, discount

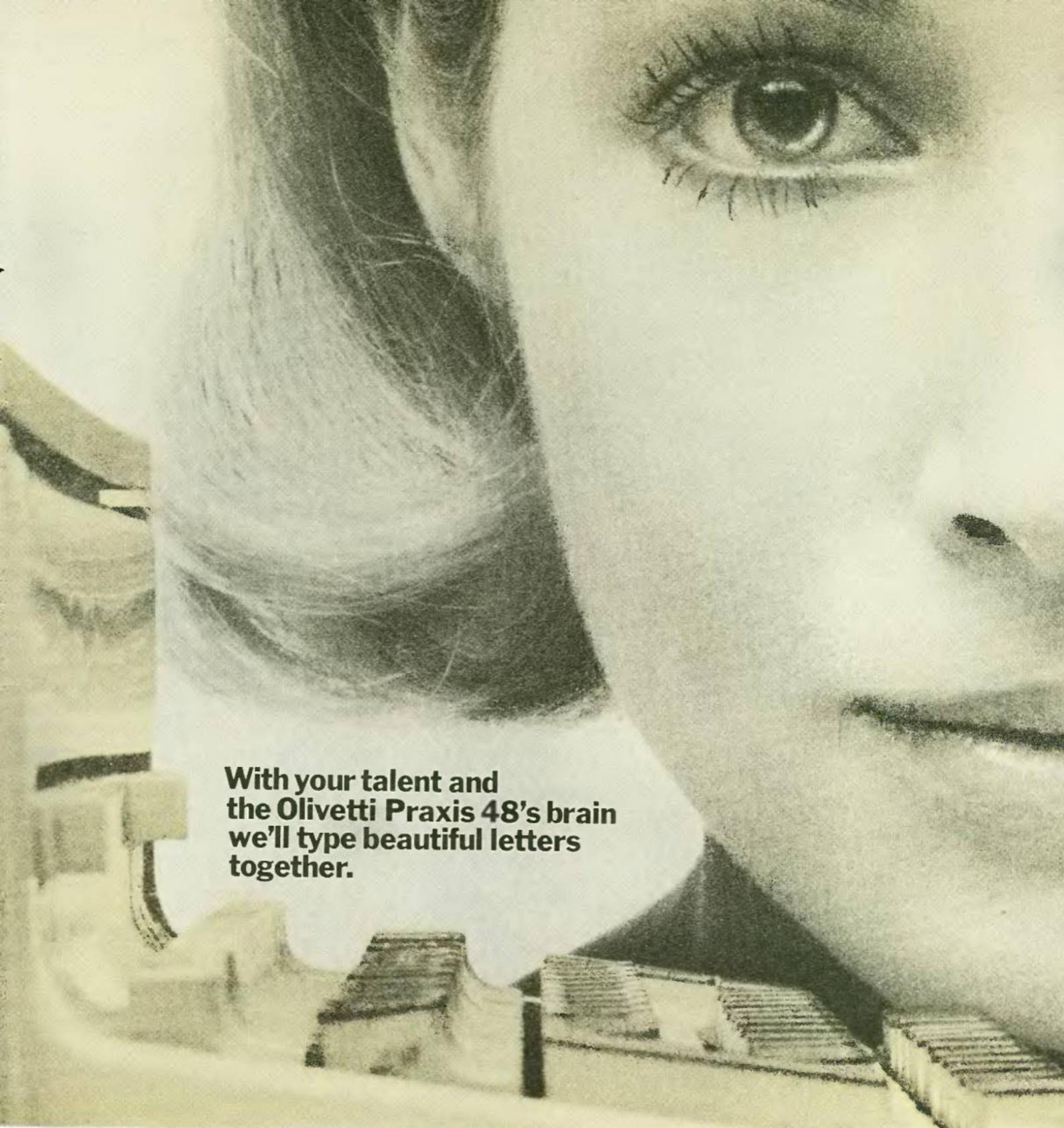
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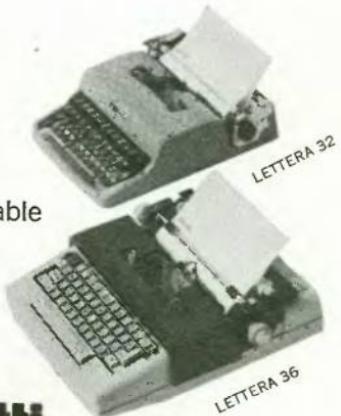
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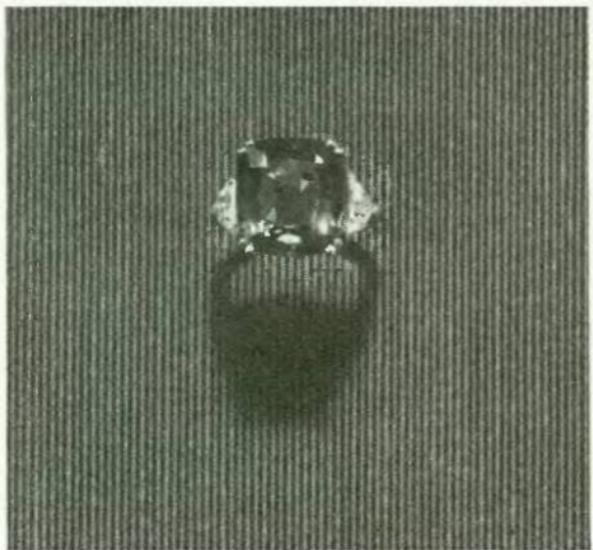


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stores, stores that sell wigs, young women selling flowers from carts, a newsstand, shoe stores, office-supply stores, notions shops, airline-ticket offices, bookstores, movie houses, banks, restaurants, a department store, a hotel, an experimental public school for children from the center of the city, a pastry shop, fast-food places, a Christian Science Reading Room, a liquor store, an Army-Navy store, a place that sells organs and pianos, a store specializing in "adult" movies and books, an optician's, a \$1.99 "steak palace," a poolroom, a radio station, a record store, and the Old Walnut Chile Parlor Number 3. The visitor also finds people actively enjoying the mall. They are not mesmerized by their surroundings, as people often seem to be in the more sterile, enclosed shopping centers, with their piped-in music to dictate everyone's pace. The pedestrians on the River City Mall are more individualistic; their pace is tuned to the sounds of the city, not to the beat of Muzak. Some, especially the older people, sit on the benches and take in the sun; children scamper through the playing areas; teen-agers congregate in animated bunches; shoppers walk out of one store and across what was the street into another without bothering to look both ways for traffic.

"We approached the mall not as a shopping mall but as a pedestrian mall," Wilson W. Wyatt, Jr., said not long ago. Wyatt is the executive director of Louisville Central Area, Inc., the prime mover behind the mall, and has played an important part in creating the downtown attraction that his father, when he was mayor three decades ago, once promoted. "We're trying to create an atmosphere of belonging," Wyatt said. "Not just being a shopping center or a bank building but, rather, a whole exciting thing. It's drawn all kinds of people into Louisville from all over the state, and from Indiana, and then we started getting letters from other cities, saying, 'How are you doing this?' And pretty soon urban planners were saying, 'What's going on in Louisville?' And the truth of the matter is we're just plain having fun in the city."

IT is unlikely, given Louisville's traditional disinclination to do anything drastic or too quickly, that the riverfront and mall projects could have been brought to fruition if the city's leading banks had continued their conservative approach to downtown development. As the seventies began, however, the banks cast off a lot of

their conservatism and undertook significant building programs of their own, which gave the whole development program a big impetus. Within just a few years, three major banks have erected skyscrapers. The Citizens Fidelity Bank made the first move, with a thirty-story office building that cost about fifteen million dollars and was situated about a third of the way from Broadway to the river. Then the Louisville Trust Company built its new home, a twenty-four-story building, costing six million dollars, almost smack on the river, just behind Schneider's hotel. Then the First National Bank of Louisville started construction on a forty-story building on Main Street—about as close to the river as the Louisville Trust Company had got—at a cost of about twenty-two million dollars.

The new buildings are commonly referred to in Louisville as evidence of the bank's commitment to the future of the city, and the bankers do not go to great pains to deny this. A. Stevens Miles, the forty-four-year-old president of the First National Bank of Louisville, explained to an acquaintance not long ago that his bank's decision was based on a combination of altruism and good business sense; the bank, Miles said, had come very close to making its commitment not to the center of the city but to suburbia. Five years or so ago, the bank was considering expanding, and "the real growth in Louisville was in the suburban area," he went on. "When we thought about what kind of facility we needed, we didn't start out by thinking we needed a high-rise building. We had seriously considered having a large branch as our main downtown location, and for our operations and data-processing area we had seriously considered a warehouse-type facility of minimum-grade con-

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struction on the periphery of town. We felt that communications are no longer a great problem, and, from the standpoint of pure economics, it would cost us some three dollars and fifty cents a foot per year there versus seven-fifty a foot in a new building downtown. So from that standpoint it seemed like a good economic decision. Obviously, I'm glad we didn't make it." Miles turned and looked out of his office window, high above Main Street. A mile away, an enormous tug was slowly pushing a string of barges loaded with steel toward the Mississippi River. An important factor in the bank's decision not to go to the suburbs, Miles said, was the Gruen Report. The bank's directors decided that they wanted to build what Miles called "a facility of some significance," and they thought the consultants' spinal-column approach "made a lot of sense." So the bank asked the architectural firm that was planning its new facility to "find a location at one end or the other of this spinal column." Miles continued, "Property down here on the waterfront was available, through urban renewal, and we could take advantage of the super view that we get of the river, and so we made essentially a twenty-two-million-dollar commitment for construction alone to the redevelopment of the waterfront."

Miles was asked if the people who run the bank were consciously declaring, when they made their commitment, that Louisville ought to be turned back toward the river. "Well, I think so," he replied. "There was no question about that. We feel very strongly that, as a bank, we should participate in the rebirth, the growth, of the community. And there were some economic considerations as well. We have shareholders to answer to. So it isn't entirely altruistic. However, to a certain degree we wanted to use our strength and our influence to bring about this rebirth. I don't want to give our bank all the credit, of course. The other banks have all made similar commitments, of varying scope and size. The rebirth of Louisville and the real turnaround in philosophy and attitude aren't the result of our action alone, or the result of Al Schneider's action, or the result of Archie Cochran's planning and dedication to the belvedere and the return to the waterfront. It is really a concerted effort on everybody's part. And now, you know, it's like a winning football team. For some years, Louisville didn't have a very high opinion of itself. People would say, 'Gee, look what's going on in

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Cincinnati,' and 'Look what's going on in Nashville,' and 'Look what they're doing in Memphis.' And somebody would say, 'Why doesn't Louisville do that?' And the answer always was 'Oh, Louisville's just an old sleepy river town, and it probably never will do these things.' Now the reverse is true. Contingents from Memphis are coming to Louisville to see what we're doing. And people from Nashville are looking at our riverfront to see if they can do something like that with the Cumberland River. And, of course, the result of this is that we in Louisville have a much higher opinion of ourselves. This is a contagious sort of thing. Also, we have groups of private investors from out of town—there were some here recently from the West Coast, and others from the East Coast—who are looking at Louisville as a potential site for some sort of facility. Their reaction to what's going on in Louisville is very exciting and stimulating to us, because they hold Louisville in high regard, and they think Louisville's on the move, so now you find that the business community and all the citizens of Louisville have a much higher opinion of themselves than they had before."

It is fairly obvious that Louisville's business community has more self-esteem now. Tall buildings seem to create that feeling almost automatically, and people who are concerned about the business climate are ready with statistics on growth—such as that in the twelve months ending in November, 1973, two and a half million square feet of new office space had been built, and that the cost of new construction in the city, including a medical complex, educational facilities, and government offices, is averaging about ninety-four million dollars a year. What is harder to determine is the degree to which the citizens' pride and confidence has been increased.

Wilson Wyatt, Jr., seems sure that there is a good deal of momentum behind the big, flashy construction projects, and that Louisville's continued progress in the direction of a revived downtown and riverfront is virtually assured. Just recently, the state government promised to help finance a new exhibition hall, with attendant hotel and garage, on Fourth Street, and Wyatt sees that promise as further assurance that Louisville is being given an entire new downtown, properly oriented toward the river. Now, he feels, it is important to make sure that the people of Louisville—not just its bankers, its merchants, and the

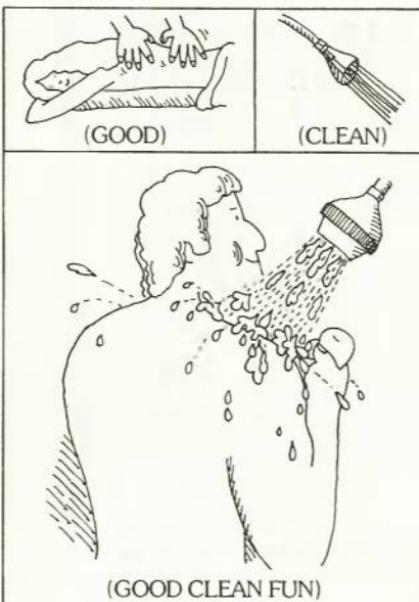
visitors who come to stay in its hotel rooms high above the river—become involved in the new downtown. Accordingly, when the belvedere and the mall were opened to the public, Wyatt's office got into the business of what he called "promoting Louisville to Louisvillians." He collected about eighty thousand dollars in donations from commercial interests in the central business district and set about trying to let the citizens know that they had a new downtown. "The idea was that by using the mall as a stage, and using the belvedere as a stage, we could introduce people to their new city without any sales and without any gimmicks—and without their buying any tickets," Wyatt said. "Everything was free. The hope was that we might be able—in this city, which had never known it before—to create some improvisation, some spontaneity, to get people to kind of do their own thing. We believed that the riverfront was exciting, but we also knew that it had been under construction, with walls around it, for two years, and no one knew it existed, and they wouldn't believe it until they saw it, and they needed to hear about it."

Louisvillians heard about it, all right. The first formal event to be held in the new downtown, on both the mall and the belvedere, was the 1973 Bluegrass Music Festival of the United States. It lasted three days around the end of May, and Wyatt estimates that it attracted twenty-five thousand people. (The second Bluegrass Music Festival, which took place in the spring of 1974, drew a hundred and twenty-five thousand people.) The singer John Hartford was the leading attraction for the first festival, and there were fifteen other bluegrass groups. "That plaza was running over with people," Wyatt said. "There were about ten thousand there the final night." Then, last year, came the first Louisville Summer Festival, a sixteen-day series of events on the mall and the riverfront, which included presentations by choral groups and the Free Street Theatre, more bluegrass music, and folk music, dance, drama, children's theatre, quartet singing, an arts-and-crafts fair, sidewalk painting, food, street dancing, historic tours, a tennis demonstration, and a "country-and-Western youth festival" that featured such groups as the Kentuckiana Kloggers and the Moon Rockers Square Dance Club. In September, there was a week-long Salute to the Arts, with music, dance, poetry, painting, sculpture, opera, "creative stitchery," crocheting, pottery, silver-

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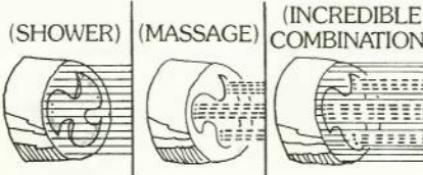


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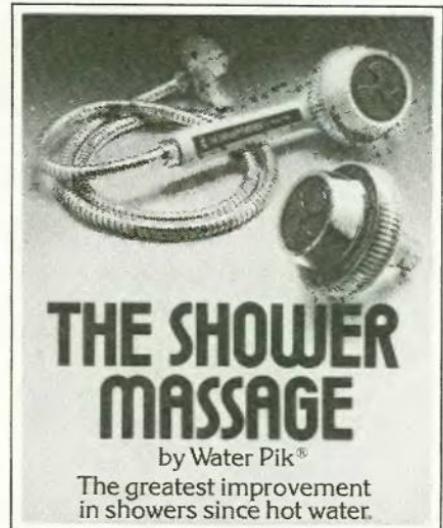
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smithing, weaving on looms, chair-caning, and performances by the Louisville Ballet Company in the display window of Stewart's, a department store on the mall. A few days later, the Louisville Orchestra gave a pop-and-bluegrass concert on the riverfront plaza. It started with Tchaikovsky's overture to "Romeo and Juliet" and ended with the Berea College Country Dancers doing "Appalachian Square Dance."

"What it all did was simply unbelievable," Wyatt said recently. "I mean, you'd go to your suburban cocktail parties and hear people say, 'Gee, you know, I was downtown, and it's a lot of fun. The ballet on the belvedere was just fantastic.' Or 'I'd never heard bluegrass music before, and that was a lot of fun. We went back with the whole family.' And blacks were mixed with whites, and no one felt a thing. Not any tension at all. Not one incident the whole summer, and if you can say that about a public festivity, day and night, that's something. It was like a great big party for the city of Louisville." There was at least one non-scheduled event that some Louisvillians classified as an incident. A group of young visitors to the belvedere in the summer of 1973 decided to go wading in the pools, and at least one of them removed not only her shoes but also the rest of her clothing, and certain other visitors objected to this. A controversy ensued in the letters columns of the *Courier-Journal* and the *Times*, and it was resolved temporarily only by the arrival of cold weather. With the return of warm weather this spring, "No Wading" signs were posted, but they are ignored.

Cold weather also brought to a temporary end the diverse scheduled happenings on the mall and the riverfront last year, but in November, when the city flooded one of the larger pools on the belvedere and froze it, there was ice-skating on the banks of the Ohio, with the new skyscrapers looming in the background. (More than one Louisvillian, commenting on the rink, would start out, "Of course, it's not as big as the one in Rockefeller Center, but...") And last December 1st, when Dr. Harvey Sloane was sworn in as Louisville's new mayor, he chose the belvedere as the site for the ceremony. Wyatt, in the meantime, was trying to figure out ways to get people to use their new downtown all year round. He said that a lot of physical work still had to be done—that new shops and restaurants were needed to complement the new tall buildings, and that there was still a great shortage of

housing for Louisville's less well-off residents. "We have an awful long period of time during which we've got to deal with things as they are," he said. "And I think that during this period, when we're planning and developing, we need to quadruple our activities—the street events—and have something every single day, seven days a week, and every night all year long. And if we can do that, I think that this entire community is just going to be *beside* itself."

WYATT'S assertion that his city now needs to do a lot that is not in the category of tall bank buildings and riverfront belvederes is one that is shared by quite a number of Louisvillians these days. Yet a few years ago a visitor to the city at the Falls of the Ohio heard little talk of this kind. It seems that the shining new downtown has performed several functions in addition to its intended ones of providing a center for the metropolitan area and of pointing the city back toward the river. It is possible that the mall and the riverfront have shown Louisvillians that complacency need not be a chronic condition, and, further, that one can now look beyond the downtown area to the human needs of the city as a whole. There had been talk all along about what a nice place Louisville was, but such talk had referred mostly not to the city itself but to its suburbs—to such upper-middle-class communities as Anchorage, Harrods Creek, the Highlands, and St. Matthews. Now the talk is about making the *city* a better place in which to live, work, and play—but especially in which to live.

One agency that is hard at work on this task is the Planning Commission, a joint city-county agency directed by Donald Ridings, who formerly served as the urban-affairs expert for the *Courier-Journal*. Ridings, who is thirty-seven, and a number of young planners he has hired since December of 1972, when he became the commission's director, have been busy trying to put together what he calls "some sort of over-all development scheme" for the city and the county, and when he talks about development he is not talking about just buildings. "We're trying to develop a *public* focus on the riverfront," Ridings told a visitor not long ago. "We're trying to do something with regard to the historic areas and districts; we're trying to get into neighborhood planning; and we're trying to link it all together into one graphically explainable kind of scheme. We want to tie our parks plan into

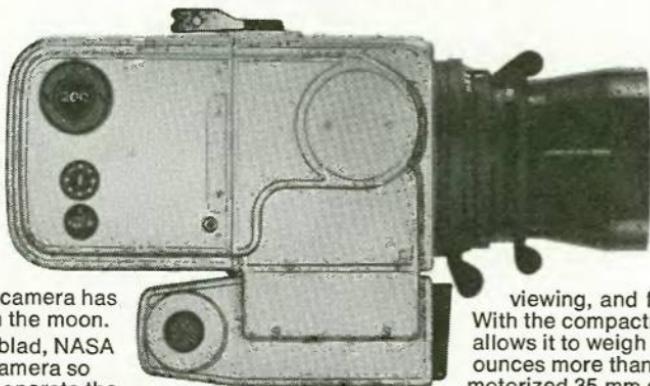


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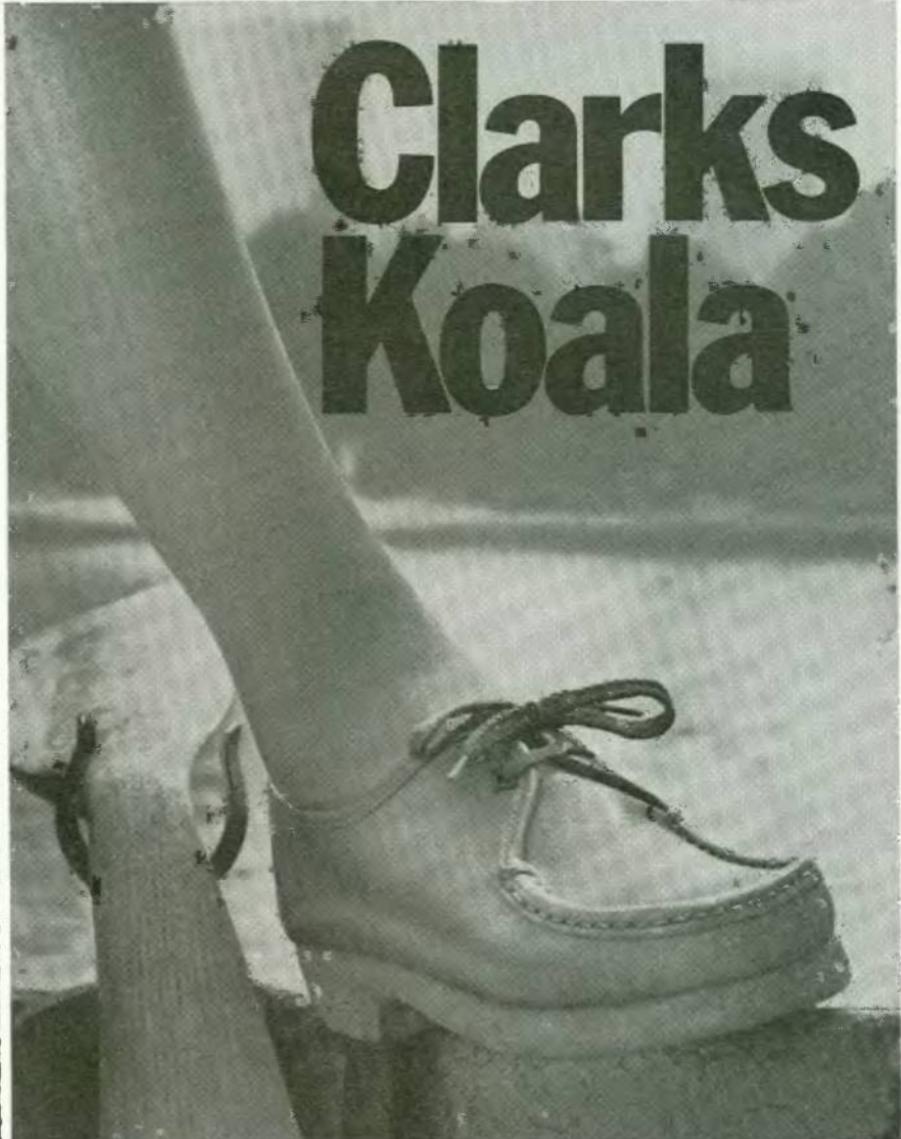
it. Our bicycle paths, which would go the length of the Ohio River in the city, would be tied into it. The reclaiming of the river as a public utility is tied into it. The historical thrust can be tied into it. These are just things that it'd take a fool not to want to tie into, and it gives us some basis for claiming that the people have reason to go back and grab a piece of the river." Ridings said that as far as he and his planners were concerned the construction of the belvedere was just the first step toward opening up the Ohio River to the people. "We want to make the river accessible to people all along its length, not just at the belvedere," he said. There are a number of barriers to such a plan—notably the railroad tracks, the roadways, and the industries that now run along the riverfront—but Ridings has discovered that most of the land is owned by the city, which leases it out, so he is hopeful that the plan is within the realm of possibility. Ridings' planners discovered that one narrow strip of shoreline is controlled by the Army Corps of Engineers, and are convinced that it is just the right width for a bicycle path. Along stretches of the shoreline that are classified as flood plain, and that therefore will not support permanent structures, they are thinking about anchoring floating restaurants in the water. There is an old railroad bridge over the Ohio which the railroad does not use but which, according to Ridings, it says it is too impoverished to tear down, and some planners are suggesting that it be made into an interstate boardwalk, with shops and restaurants on it.

The bankers and the commercial interests were primarily instrumental in turning the Riverfront Project and the River City Mall into realities, but if the proposals of Ridings and others are to be implemented help will have to come from two other areas: the elected officials and the citizens themselves. And, interestingly, movement is now well under way in both those areas. Louisville has had progressive political leadership for some time, but the current occupant of the mayor's office, Harvey Sloane, is thought of as a person likely to give unprecedented attention to the needs of individual citizens, and especially individual neighborhoods. Mayor Sloane is a thirty-eight-year-old physician, who was elected last fall on his first try for political office. He was born in New York City, grew up in Virginia, and attended Yale and the Western Reserve School of Medicine. Being independently wealthy, he never entered private medical practice. He

has worked with the Public Health Service in the mountains of eastern Kentucky, and when he came to Louisville, in 1966, he started and directed a neighborhood health center in one of the city's poorer black communities.

Politicians were surprised in May of 1973 when, in the Democratic primary for mayor, Dr. Sloane defeated a candidate who had the support of the incumbent mayor, Frank Burke, who by law could not succeed himself. In the ensuing campaign, Dr. Sloane was assumed to be a "limousine liberal," who would founder on the political realities, but, as the *Courier-Journal's* political editor, Bill Billiter, said in an analysis, he "stressed flinty-eyed pragmatism rather than dewy-eyed liberalism." One of the issues Dr. Sloane was flinty-eyed about was law and order. His chief opponent, a Republican named C. J. Hyde, was a former Louisville police chief, and it was assumed that Hyde would have the edge on the issue. Dr. Sloane neatly reduced that edge by becoming the law-and-order candidate himself, but not in a way that infuriated the more liberal voters. He advocated more foot patrols for the police department; he said he wanted to relieve policemen of duties not directly connected with law enforcement; and he opposed the formation of a civilian review board to oversee police activities.

The emphasis on security unquestionably gained Dr. Sloane points among the voters (the newspapers said that all the opinion polls had shown it to be the electorate's major concern), but the candidate also placed great emphasis on Louisville's need to do more about the places where its people



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lived—its neighborhoods. The city's downtown development, which was then nearing completion, fitted handily into Dr. Sloane's campaign rhetoric. In January of 1973, when he announced that he was running for mayor, he told the voters, "We see the concrete evidence of brick-and-mortar progress all around us, and we have marvelled at it and taken new pride from it. But you may have asked what does it do for you. And I think you seek assurance that this city of the seventies will also meet the simple human needs of people living in their own neighborhoods, building a future for their own families." During the months of campaigning that followed, Dr. Sloane issued a number of detailed position papers on issues facing Louisville, and several of them concerned his ideas about neighborhoods. He proposed the creation of a revolving fund, in which the city would deposit half a million dollars in local banks but would not draw interest on it. Rather, the banks would be allowed to use the interest they would have paid out to reduce by about half their own interest rates on loans to Louisvillians who wanted to improve their homes. Dr. Sloane also advocated for Louisville an experimental "urban homesteading" program, like one now in effect in Wilmington, Delaware. In Wilmington, houses that have been abandoned or whose mortgages have been foreclosed because of tax delinquencies are given to people who agree to rehabilitate and live in them.

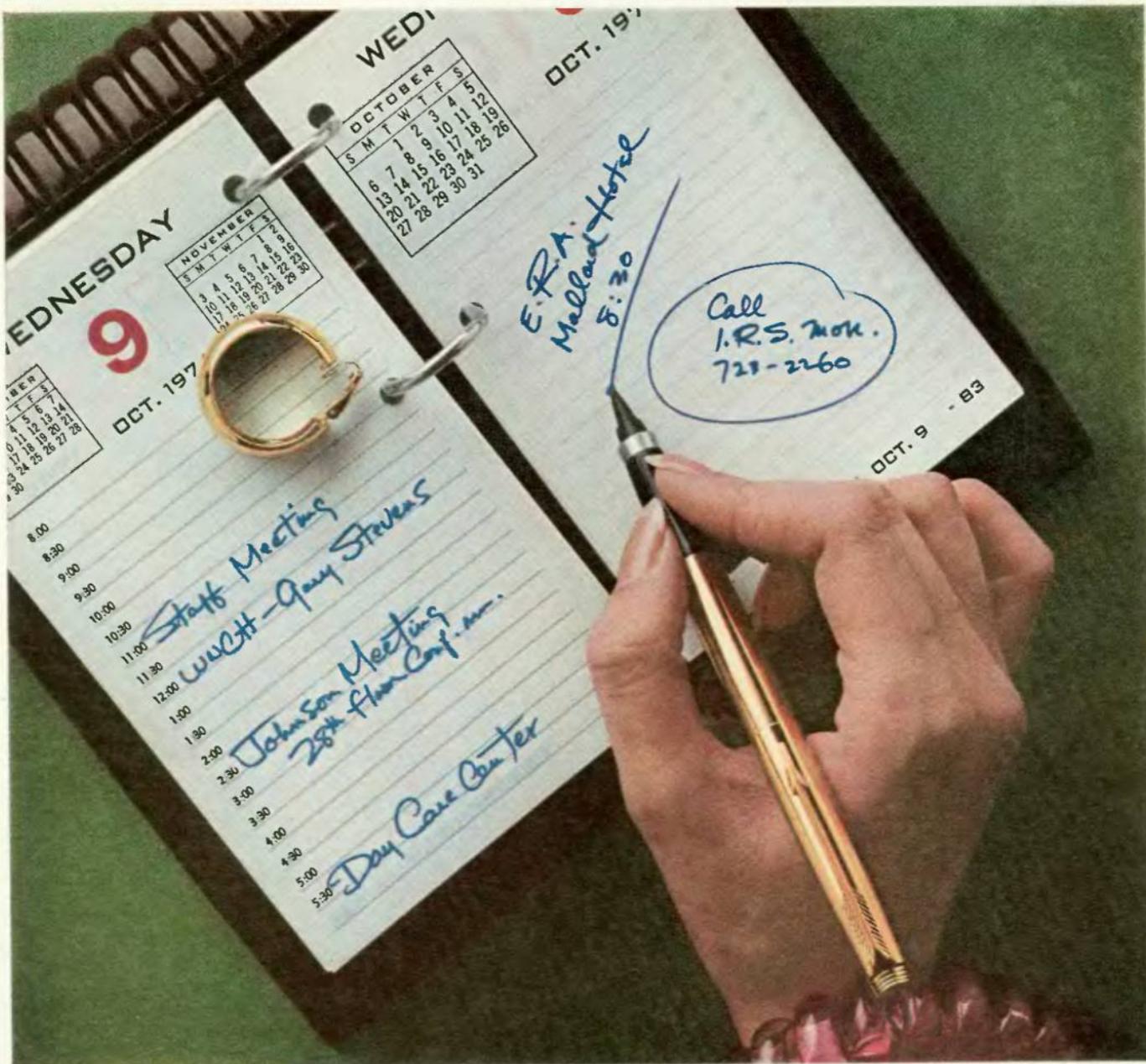
In the election, on November 6, 1973, Dr. Sloane won by a margin of better than two to one, and there is little doubt that he interpreted the returns as a mandate for increased neighborhood development. After the election, he told a visitor, "I want to concentrate on neighborhoods as much as in the last three or four years we've concentrated on the downtown." The new mayor reiterated this theme during his inauguration ceremony on the belvedere. Again he used the new downtown, part of which he was standing on, as a contrast. "Here, at our river's edge, our city's place of origin, we now see all the vital signs of self-renewal," he said. "Each stone in this belvedere, each brick and iron bar in the buildings around us, witnesses the power and determination of our city and her people. . . . We must look at our city as a whole to see the true nature of our problems. Proud as we are of this great urban center, our goal is not sheer growth. The end of our actions is the source of our strength: people, not buildings; people, not highways; peo-

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ple, not sprawling and unmanageable growth. We will not allow the neighborhoods that house and sustain our people to be split, gouged, and torn asunder by purposeless development. Those neighborhoods that have declined, whose houses have been blighted, abandoned, or boarded up, must be renewed. The city is a place to live. We must save it as a homeland for our children." After his speech, the new mayor led his fellow-Louisvillians in a brief walk from the belvedere to a reception, which was held, in what was undoubtedly an act of unconscious symbolism, in the lobby of one of the new bank buildings.

A SURPRISINGLY large number of citizens are already at work renewing neighborhoods and staving off purposeless development. Almost every older American city of any size has its renovators—the counterparts of the young professionals who in recent years have swept into the Georgetown section of Washington and the brownstone neighborhoods of New York City—but in Louisville the movement seems to have a little more organization and bite to it. The renovators there, as elsewhere, have formed neighborhood associations, and they hold block parties, but they also have become activists: they have got into the house-buying-and-renovating business, and they occasionally have brought lawsuits to protect their communities from what they consider the encroachment of irresponsible or unattractive development. The movement has been particularly effective in Mayor Sloane's own neighborhood, which is called the Old Louisville area. Around a century ago, when Louisville's business district was close to the river, Old Louisville was one of its first suburbs. It is situated a little more than two miles south of the Ohio and a short distance north of the campus of the University of Louisville. Although the neighborhood was one of the city's more fashionable residential areas, with a number of antebellum mansions and eighty per cent of the homes built before 1909 still standing, it was in constant danger of being torn down or overrun by commercial and new residential and institutional development. A 1969 report of the University's Urban Studies Center noted, "No other neighborhood in Louisville is as integrative of different social, racial, and economic groups. To the west lie solidly black neighborhoods. To the east and south lie suburban white Louisville and Jefferson County. It is the only area of the city which

offers some hope of a community that can include all of the diverse people of a city. It is both rich and poor, black and white, old and young."

In December of 1968, the Neighborhood Development Corporation was formed in Old Louisville, largely through the efforts of four churches in the area, whose leaders wanted to halt the trend toward deterioration. The incorporators thought that by obtaining housing-rehabilitation funds from the federal government they could do a lot to restore some of the neighborhood's older but still attractive houses. The original plan was to buy about ten houses—"unoccupied, derelict, boarded-up property that was still good enough to save," in the words of one of the planners—which when renovated would yield thirty-five to forty apartments, and to rent them, with the help of one of the Department of Housing and Urban Development's rent-subsidy programs, at reasonable rates to people who wanted to stay in the city. Then came President Nixon's January, 1973, freeze on federal housing money. "We decided we'd just try it without any federal help," Mae Salyers, the executive director of the Neighborhood Development Corporation, said recently. As Mrs. Salyers spoke, she was at the top of a ladder in a pleasant eighty-five-year-old house in Old Louisville, straightening out the seam in a length of candy-striped wallpaper that she had just hung. She explained that after the federal freeze the corporation revised its goals and purchased four houses and a vacant lot with a conventional bank loan. (A member of the corporation's board personally guaranteed the loan.) One of the houses, the one Mrs. Salyers was working on, had cost the corporation eight thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars. "It wasn't a bad buy," she said. It was a large, rambling brick home, the perfect size for a large family. Mrs. Salyers said she thought the corporation would ask about twenty-four thousand dollars for the house after it was renovated. Two months ago, the corporation sold the renovated home for twenty-five thousand five hundred dollars to a black family with six children, and recently it has purchased, with the help of low-cost loans from the state, seven more houses it plans to renovate and an eighth it resold to a buyer who will do the renovation himself, bringing to twelve the number of houses that the Neighborhood Development Corporation has had a hand in upgrading in about a year's time.

The corporation, Mrs. Salyers explained, is not just a tenants' associa-

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tion, nor is it a real-estate outfit in search of a profit. "We're sort of an organization that tries to act as a catalyst to get anything done that will help to revitalize the neighborhood," she said. "We sit and watch requests for zoning changes; we appear at hearings; we've filed a couple of lawsuits in zoning situations. In one we were successful, and the other hasn't been settled yet. It involves that industrial-looking building across the street." She pointed with her paperhanger's brush out the window, toward a nondescript building on a lot filled with trucks and cars. "They applied for a building permit to build offices. What it is, really, is a wrecker service."

Resuming her work, Mrs. Salyers continued, "First of all, we want to provide some decent housing at a reasonable cost. We concentrate on the worst-looking property on the block, and hope this will turn the neighborhood around and start the trend the other way. Also, it will give us visibility in the community, and that will help us do other things." The corporation's efforts seemed to be paying off. "We're getting a lot of interest in the immediate vicinity," she said. "The house next door is owner-occupied, and the lady who owns it was getting very discouraged about the neighborhood and had decided to sell out and move away. Well, then this started happening." Mrs. Salyers waved a hand toward the candy-striped wallpaper and new plasterboard around her. "And the lady next door said, 'I'm going to stay, because I like my house, and the neighborhood seems to be improving.' This is what we're trying to do."

A FEW hours later and a few miles away, Jim Ségest sat before the fire in his brick town house in Butchertown, another neighborhood close to Louisville's new downtown, and explained what Butchertown, Inc., had done. Except for the fact that it was undergoing renovation, Butchertown had little in common with Old Louisville. The houses in Butchertown are not mansions; they are solid-looking dwellings that were originally inhabited by German settlers who came in the eighteen-thirties to start Louisville's meat-packing industry. (The stockyards are just to the east of the city's business district, and Butchertown is just next to them.) Some of the Butchertown houses are two- or three-story brick structures, tall and narrow, like the row houses of Baltimore or the brownstones of New York; others are

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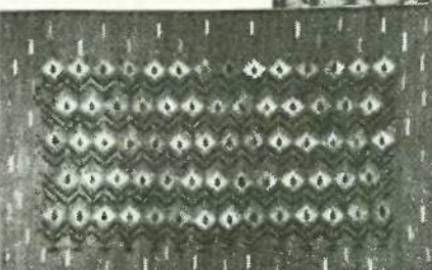
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short and squat. Butchertown is surrounded by industries, and until a few years ago it was inhabited almost exclusively by people who worked in those industries, or by older German-American families who owned their homes and had decided to stay, or by people who needed rental housing at relatively low cost. The neighborhood had about three thousand residents. In the middle and late sixties, Butchertown was discovered by a younger, more affluent group of people, who bought houses and set about renovating them.

This has happened in a number of American cities, and the result has usually been that well-off suburbanites who are bored with suburbia discover what the young renovators have done and buy their way into the neighborhood, driving the sale value of the housing ever upward until all the original, lower-income residents are gone. This is not what has happened in Butchertown, though, and if people like Segrest have their way it will never happen there. "We don't want to drive anybody out of the neighborhood," said Segrest, who is thirty-three years old, and who was a city planner before he started working in and on Butchertown full time. "We want everybody who's here here. We have the idea that if there are people in this neighborhood who have problems—social problems, any kind of problems—we don't want to 'improve' Butchertown's situation by moving them someplace else. That's an idea that lots of people have, I think: that if you've got a problem the best way to handle it is to move it away."

In the mid-sixties, Segrest and others who felt the way he did founded Butchertown, Inc., and Segrest has been one of the organization's most energetic members. Like its counterpart in Old Louisville, the Butchertown agency has not been content with being just a neighborhood-improvement association; it was organized as a profit-making corporation, with about a hundred residents chipping in ten dollars a share to get it started. The corporation sponsors some of the traditional neighborhood activities; there is a spring festival, at which artists and flea-market and antique dealers are invited (after paying a fee) to set up their displays and sell their wares on the sidewalks, and there is an Oktoberfest. ("We try to keep that as pure as we can," Segrest said, with a smile. "Just eating and beer-drinking and music. Last time, about fourteen thousand people came. We hope that someday it will rival the Derby.") The corporation has planted



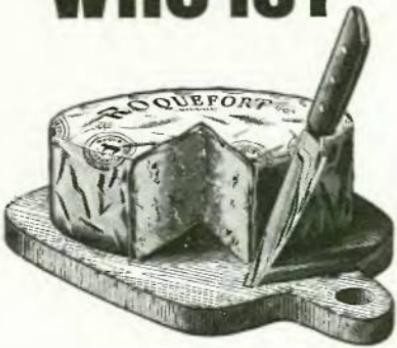
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a hundred trees—the gift of one of the downtown banks—along the sidewalks. But it has also used its shareholders' money, and the profits from the festivals, to buy three run-down houses, and one of them has already been renovated. Apartments in the house now rent for sixty and sixty-five dollars a month. And the corporation has used some of its funds to fight what it considers unnecessary intrusions into the area. When a nearby hospital announced plans to construct a laundry facility of the Quonset-hut variety in Butchertown, the corporation hired an architect to suggest modifications in the plans for the laundry which would fit in with the architecture of the neighborhood. The hospital accepted the architect's suggestions.

A lot of the things that Butchertown, Inc., has been able to do—especially the purchase of the houses—have been made possible by the fact that property costs in the neighborhood are low. The house that Segrest lives in, a two-story brick row house, would command at least fifty thousand dollars in a New York brownstone neighborhood, but he bought it for two thousand. A visitor asked Segrest what he would take for the house now. "I would take exactly what I have in it, which is about seventeen thousand dollars," he said. "You see, one of our ideas is that if we cause property values to become inflated, then we're going to undo our whole purpose, which is to keep the people who are here here." Segrest recently sold the house for eighteen thousand five hundred dollars—seventeen thousand dollars plus a fifteen-hundred-dollar agent's fee. He has since moved into another house in Butchertown, which he had previously renovated. Some real-estate agents, Segrest said, had already alerted themselves to Butchertown's potential, and they were asking residents if they'd like to sell—presumably so that better-off suburbanites could move into a city neighborhood that was certified to be on the upswing. So far, he said, not many Butchertowners were selling. "A lot of property that's here is under the control of people who are interested in the Butchertown idea," he said. "And we hope we can let the people who own property here know that they can't do any better anyplace else—that the whole idea of the neighborhood will be destroyed if all new people move in and the people who were here move out."

There is, however, the possibility that Segrest himself will move out. He explained it this way: "Butchertown is



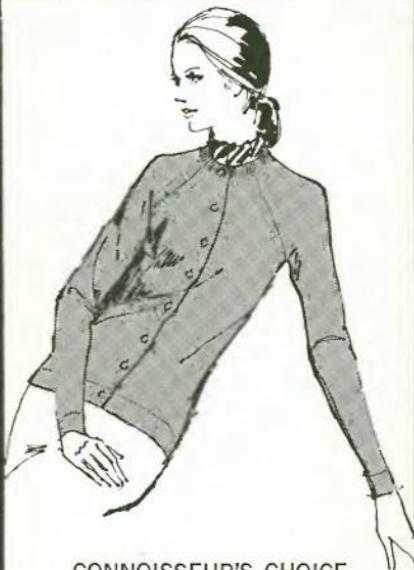
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getting so good, and so stable, and there are so many people involved, that they can do it themselves. And I'd like to move on to another neighborhood and try to get the same thing going there. Take the West End, for example." The West End is a largely black and run-down area of Louisville. It is separated from Butchertown by downtown—the shiny new downtown that a lot of Louisvillians used to think would never get built because of complacency and laziness. "In the West End, there are just lots of fine neighborhoods where all the people are really close to one another, but they don't have a great deal of enthusiasm about the place where they are," Segrest continued. "And I think that if we could try some of the same ideas there—young people moving in and doing over houses that are in really bad shape—we could get the same thing going. We could get the same thing going in a lot of different places in Louisville, and then none of the neighborhoods would get overdone. They could still remain neighborhoods. And the outcome would be that all the neighborhoods would be really good places to live, and nobody would feel he was in a ghetto, and everybody would want to stay. The people would realize that their situation and all the things that are available in the city make it the best place for them to live."

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