

# Center city<sup>©</sup>

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## ANOTHER ATLANTA?

by David Bowman

A recent trip to Atlanta reminded me again what a good city Memphis is. Those who say we need a Peachtree Center, a Colony Square, or an Underground Atlanta here ought to check their facts again. Those who say we need to be more like Atlanta ought to have their heads examined.

At the top of the Hyatt Regency, in dead-center Atlanta, all I could see around the downtown were expressways and parking lots. There was no focus for the buildings, like our bluffs, and nothing beautiful to look at, like our Mississippi River and its undeveloped Arkansas shore. The new Atlanta is simply a spine of high-rise towers along Peachtree Street, with long gaps north and south where interesting old residences or commercial blocks have been removed for doctors' offices or asphalt. The best of old Atlanta, like the Fox Theater and the Biltmore Hotel, seem to be stranded; they stand off by themselves, pathetic, cut off by vacant lots like Beal and the Malco Theatre.

It seems as if Atlanta wanted to have one street that looked like New York City. The price of high-density there was turning the surrounding downtown into zero-density. By not insisting on sixty-story construction, and by turning old low-rise buildings to new uses, Memphis could have an overall higher density for its downtown than Atlanta!

There is also a horrible shortage downtown of parks and greenspace, except for the new spindly-treed Central Park (about two acres), a pathetic

parody of New York's great park. Memphis has reserved greenspace downtown from the beginning and has enough undeveloped blocks for more squares and people-places, if the City and the Park Commission move to preserve them now.

Colony Square has been used in Memphis as an example of "downtown housing." It isn't: it's about twenty blocks from downtown, up in Ansley Park, a nice old suburb like our Central Gardens area and just as far out. Its two office towers and its two residential towers seem to be under-occupied. Its luxury hotel seems to be doing alright, only it's in the wrong place, like our Hyatt Regency. The Square's shopping mall and support services also seemed to be under-used, except for an ice rink, lit by an immense skylight, and jammed with kids, a clearly successful venture.

Across Peachtree from Colony Square is the Memorial Arts Center, a ponderous and pretentious symbol of Atlanta's delusions of grandeur. The building is so heavy with marble and reinforced concrete that it makes the Kennedy Center soar like a bird by comparison. Just south of the Arts Center, however, is a place called The Castle, an 1895 one-man's fantasy with Corinthian columns and bracketed turrets; the house is built over the stone coach-house dug into the side of the hill. As might be expected, the old Atlanta is infinitely more interesting than the new Atlanta.

I went to Underground Atlanta at lunchtime one day and found many interesting shops, but the

place was almost deserted. I went back on a Friday night and found it almost as deserted. The word is out that the whole complex is in trouble. Maybe tourists and Atlantans feel the neighborhood is too rough, or perhaps they find it too scruffy to be the regular patrons Memphis has in Overton Square. The shops and bars under the viaducts aren't nearly as pleasant as the open courtyards at the back of the complex or elsewhere. The problem is that the viaducts were awful in the first place: they shut out the sunlight and the fresh air. Occasionally the passages smell like sewers and look a bit spooky like scenes from *The Third Man*. The sow's ear that became a silk purse is again a sow's ear.

Fortunately, there are signs that Atlanta is no longer grow-crazy and is returning to its senses. Old neighborhoods like Inman Park, Buckhead, and West End are restoring their houses and stopping new motorways like I-485 and the Stone Mountain Freeway. *Atlanta*, the magazine of the local Chamber of Commerce, is speaking frankly about its mistakes of the past decade. Several community weeklies, like *Atlanta Gazette* and *Creative Loafing*, are abandoning heavy ideological trips for articles like "Sizing Up an Old House," while the *Great Speckled Bird* fades slowly from heavy debts. And a new group, Atlanta Landmarks, Inc., is selling bumper stickers to help finance a campaign to restore the Fox Theatre to its Arabian Nights magnificence.

One thing about Atlanta is really impressive—its bus system. MARTA was created in 1972 when the metropolitan area chose to purchase the Atlanta Transit System. The first thing MARTA did was to lower its 40¢ fare to 15¢. It now provides fast and frequent bus service to an incredibly large area. It hands out route-maps and schedules to anyone who asks for them and has a dozen kiosks downtown with "information officers" to give directions as to what stops and what buses to take. Its ridership is high, and it seems to serve all segments of the community.

Comparisons between cities need not be odious: cities like Atlanta are mirrors to help us better see ourselves.

# WHAT SEATTLE DID RIGHT

by  
Carol Coletta

Seattle was the site of this year's International Downtown Executives Association annual meeting. Host cities for IDEA conferences are chosen on the basis of their suitability as laboratories to study what is right and wrong with America's cities. Fortunately for the great northwest city, conferees found more to study of the former.

Evidently, Seattle has been doing things right for a long time under the leadership of a strong, decisive Mayor, the guidance of a concerned business community, and with the enthusiasm of a spirited people who understand that the making of a great city comes with a price tag. Particularly, they are doing things right in downtown.

Reflecting what is right are the great number of active parks and public spaces, two of which are tiny jewels under construction on the waterfront and one, a vast terrace over the expressway, on downtown's opposite edge. Right is the free Magic Carpet bus service which uses a "pay in the country" system. (Mayor Ulman refused to study the plan prior to its implementation, claiming it would be cheaper to operate it a year. He was right.) Right, too, is the community's continuing support for Seattle Center, site of the 1962 World's Fair, and the ongoing effort to find new uses for that grand space.

But particularly right are the developments of Pioneer Square and Pike Place Market. Both are vestiges of another time brought remarkably back to life, not in a slick, fast-buck, don't worry-about-tomorrow sort of way, but as generically sound pieces of Seattle's history and culture. Both have been identified locally as historic districts and are being carefully reworked not as museum relics but to serve as part of a living, breathing community.

Pioneer Square is an 18-square block area situ-

ated between the core downtown and the new Kingdome stadium. Continuous activity links the three, making the trip a pleasant walk or a very short bus ride on Magic Carpet. The bay is only a block away.

In the city's earliest days it was the site of the first steam sawmill on Puget Sound that gave Seattle its economic start. In 1889 the mill town was destroyed by fire, and "skidroad", as it was called, graduated to Pioneer Square. Because much of the rebuilding was influenced by one architect, the new heart of the town had an architectural homogeneity that made it one of the most beautiful cities in America. After years of decline Old Seattle is blooming again.

Rehabilitated almost entirely on an individual basis, the colorful neighborhood is populated with "real people", i.e., the poor as well as the rich, the old in addition to the young. Restaurants, taverns, and bookshops far outnumber the apparel stores. Upper floors of the old buildings are occupied. The local grocery and drug stores are thriving and have no fear of being run out because they are needed, they have a place, because they serve a neighborhood.

Pike Place Market is in the early stages of rehabilitation and perhaps holds even more promise than Pioneer Square. The Market had its start early in this century as a street area where farmers could pull their wagons up and sell their produce directly to the consumer. Today, it is a busy series of irregular structures containing shops, farmers' day-rental stalls, arcades, ramps, and multiple floor levels for selling foods and wares. The Market area also contains rooming houses, taverns, wholesale houses, second-hand stores, and restaurants.

The 22-acre area was acquired by the local urban renewal agency which was then to sell the land back to private developers. But in 1971 citizens of Seattle voted to "save the market" by requiring major changes in the urban renewal formula and creating an Historical Commission to oversee the changes in uses and structures. Subsequently, the Mayor of Seattle chartered the Pike Place Preservation and Development Authority.

The PDA is a public corporation created to undertake renewal "in a manner that affords a con-

tinuing opportunity for Market farmers, merchants, residents, shoppers, and visitors to carry on their traditional Market activities." This contemplates expanding the sale of local farm produce; preserving and expanding the residential community; promoting the survival and predominance of small shops, marginal businesses, and thrift shops, which are essential to the functioning of the Market. And these are exactly the things a private developer would not and probably could not do. Additionally, PDA's charter requires public participation through citizen-membership in the public corporation. Citizens themselves may implement Market projects, through local entities such as the Merchants' Association, condominiums, consumer cooperatives, local development companies, and private developers. Thus, PDA serves as the unifier in this multi-faceted community effort.

Ken Patton, chairman of the Brownstone Revival Committee and president of the New York City Real Estate Board addressed the problem of recycling downtowns at that Seattle IDEA conference. He contends that most of the recycling taking place in this country has no sound basis, that projects such as Old Town in Chicago, Underground Atlanta, and even Ghiradelli in San Francisco are only facades. There are no neighborhoods to back them up. Commerce should follow community, Patton says, or at the very least community should be injected soon afterward. Community should be chosen over additional commerce to make a development continually viable. We need to make whole places again. A development needs to have a reason for being and not be simply an imitation of what was right for some other place.

In Seattle, they never stopped.

# earthly delights

## DOWNTOWN EXHIBITS

### First National Bank Building (Lobby)

November—Cartoons by Draper Hill & paintings by Lyle Ward\*

### National Bank of Commerce Building (Lobby)

November—Sculpture by David Day\*

### Sterick Building (Lobby)

November—Work of Mrs. Katie Wallace\*

## FILM

### Lyceum Film Theatre

November 25—"Adams's Rib"—First National Bank Auditorium—7:30 p.m.

## LECTURES—REVIEWS—DIALOGUE

### The American Issues Forum

November 25—"In Congress Assembled... A Representative Legislature"—discussion led by Edward F. Williams, III—First National Bank Auditorium—12:15 p.m.\*

### Values & Ethics Lecture Series

December 2—"Concepts of Health and Disease"—lecturer is Loretta Kopelman, Department of Pediatrics, University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry—the University Interfaith Center, 740 Court—12:00—1:00 p.m.\*

## MUSIC

### Memphis State University

November 22—Chamber Music—Jervis Underwood, Peter Spurbeck, Lawrence Dennis—Harris Auditorium—8:15 p.m.\*

### Chambermusik on the Square

November 22—MSU Graduate String Quartet—Playhouse on the Square—1 p.m.\*

## THEATRE

### Circuit Playhouse Theatre I

November 21 through December 21—"Sleuth"—Friday, Saturday, Sunday—8:30 p.m.

\*FREE

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## CIVIC CENTER COMMUNITY CULINARY CLUB

Serving from 11:30 to 1:15  
First Presbyterian Church, 166 Poplar Avenue  
PRICE: \$1.50 per serving, including drink

### MENU FOR NOVEMBER 20 – DECEMBER 1

#### THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20

*Fried Chicken, Rice & Gravy, Squash or Green Beans, Rolls*

#### FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21

*Ham, Blackeyed Peas, Corn, Corn Bread*

#### MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24

*Chopped Steak, Whipped Potatoes, Green Beans, Rolls*

#### TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 25

*Pork Chops, Potatoes Au Gratin, English Peas, Rolls*

#### WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26

*Spaghetti, Cole Slaw, French Bread*

#### THURSDAY & FRIDAY

NOVEMBER 27 & 28

*Closed, Happy Thanksgiving*

#### MONDAY, DECEMBER 1

*Steak w/onion gravy, Buttered carrots, Whipped Potatoes, Rolls*

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