

Pamphlet For Hotel Seems Bit Off Center

By JEFFERSON RIKER

A most distressing document came to hand last week in the midst of a series of disasters to the downtown redevelopment effort.

It was a full-color, slick paper pamphlet plugging Hyatt Regency Memphis, the 400-room, 26-story luxury hotel under construction in the Ridgeway development at Poplar and Interstate 240.



Jefferson Riker

The text accompanying the color photos—several of downtown Memphis attractions—gushed about beauty and elegance and glass bubble elevators and a “chic piano bar.”

It called the Ridgeway complex “the center of the new Memphis.”

Meanwhile, about 10 miles to the west, conventions booked for the Everett R. Cook Convention Center were being canceled to the

tune of about \$1,000,000 in lost revenue badly needed to finance the \$30-million center. The cancellations followed closure of the bankrupt Peabody and the financial troubles of other downtown hotels and motels.

The pamphlet described the Hyatt's “sweeping views of the Mississippi and three states.”

Well, the smudge on the horizon is the downtown skyline and the Mississippi River is just beyond it. But on a clear day the Hyatt lodger will be able to see Clark Tower.

But the really misleading statement was this: “You're . . . 15 minutes from downtown Memphis.” The copywriter needs a geography lesson. Try anything up to 45 minutes depending on the time of day.

Let the record reflect that Ridgeway is the child of Cook Industries, Inc., and Boyle Investment Co., both of which used to be headquartered in the downtown area.

It is hard to understand how a hotel situated with a splendid view of the eastern city limits and “five minutes from the exclusive Germantown Shopping Center” can describe itself as “The Center of Everything.” But that's what the caption said on the sketch map of the city's major streets.

I-40 was shown as completed through Overton Park, so maybe the Hyatt folks know something the rest of us don't.

The city's government, legal, financial and commercial center, decrepit though parts of it may be, remains where it has always been — at the other end of town.

It's also the center of the property tax base.

The point of it all is this:

Somewhere along the line some priorities seem to have been disarranged, and the multiple centers concept under which the city's growth was to have been planned and controlled has been badly bruised.

And there's another disturbing point to consider: Most of the people with the enthusiasm for and interest in downtown redevelopment don't have the money to make it a reality; conversely, the people with the money don't seem to have any enthusiasm for or interest in downtown.

The situation was pretty well summed up by Charles E. Moore, local executive of a large herbicide firm, in a letter to Mayor Wyeth Chandler. Moore is a member of the site selection committee for the 1981 convention of the Weed Science Society of America. Because the Peabody closed, Memphis was dropped from the list of possible sites, a loss of up to 1,500 conventioners.

“It is apparent that the business community is not willing to invest in the future of downtown Memphis,” Moore said. “Based on the past track record, I can certainly understand why they would hesitate to make such a commitment.”

He said it is “imperative” for the city and county to raise the money to provide adequate convention hotel facilities.

“Without this, the Cook Convention Center and the downtown improvements will have been wasted,” Moore said.

“The rapid completion of the downtown hotel and the development of the Beale Street project to attract the public and tourists are both vital to the successful revitalization of the downtown area.”

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