

# Downtown Renewal Aims for 1989

**D**OWNTOWN Oklahoma City sprang into existence overnight after the "Land Rush" of April 22, 1889. Rebuilding the downtown area will take a lot longer. It already has.

"Redevelopment of the downtown area has been in the forefront for the last decade and a half," said Paul Strasbaugh, executive vice president of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, "and it still has a long way to go."

Many people might consider that to be an understatement, considering the bare blocks, gaping holes and desolate look of much of the city's main business district.

It is said that more people are now employed in the huge First National Center than formerly worked in the entire downtown area. That could be true, but the fact remains that most customers shop at readily accessible malls that provide free parking.

When the much publicized I.M. Pei plan was unveiled in the mid-60s, citizens probably expected new structures to rise almost before dust had settled after demolition of

old buildings.

A few did, but it didn't work that way at all. Where the federal government is involved, it usually takes longer. Private investors have to wait to see what Uncle Sam is going to do.

It is becoming apparent that 1989 has become the goal for restoration of the downtown district. That is an important date, the 100th anniversary of the Run of '89.

At the Chamber's annual goal planning meeting, objectives for both 1979 and the coming decade were projected. Completion of the downtown urban renewal projects ranked high in both categories.

Some insisted that an elaborate celebration be scheduled as a primary project for 1989, but reconstruction came first. If this task isn't completed, there might be little reason to celebrate.

Several subcommittees mentioned "liquor-by-the-drink" as an urgent need, but "water-by-the-drink" got more support. The Chamber recognizes that additional water resources are needed to support fur-

ther growth. The president's veto of the public works bill may shift greater responsibility for this back to local people.

Transportation is another vital element. Dick Ford, committee member, said: "You can't build a great downtown without transportation — public vehicles, expressways, and parking!"

An "auto-free downtown," such as federal bureaucrats want, might become a concrete desert. People aren't ready to give up cars.

Many civic leaders are looking forward to the Myriad Gardens bringing folks back downtown, but others believe that only construction of the Galleria and adjacent quality housing will do the job.

The Chamber of Commerce has a long list of desirable projects under consideration for 1979 and the coming decade.

Oklahoma City is booming and prosperous right now, and the prospects for accomplishment is good, providing business and civic leaders team up with citizens to put them across.