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Planner Shows 'Wonderful' Cities

By SALLY FOX

Children wading and swimming in a manmade downtown waterfall . . . an urban freeway covered over by an arching park-plaza of canyons and trees . . . a ribbon of parkland connecting a downtown business district to a river's edge: It was a vision of what a city — this city — could be.

But only a handful of Buffalonians were on hand Wednesday to view the evidence of what other American cities have done for themselves in a 90-minute slide show at Hotel Statler Hilton.

The program — the first of four public forums scheduled this month to mark the nation's bicentennial — was called "A Sense of Place."

\$1,600 Grant

A \$1,600 grant from the New York State Council on the Arts made it possible; so did the support of a diverse group of sponsors ranging from the Maud Gordon Holmes Arboretum at Buffalo State College to the Western New York Society of Internal Medicine.

And what it proved was how a community, by coordinating its efforts and deciding on a common goal, can turn a dying urban center into a vital, growing place.

They did it in Minneapolis, Seattle and Omaha, and Harold Baxter, project manager of Lawrence Halprin & Associates, was in Buffalo Wednesday to show how it was done.

Planning Specialists

Baxter's firm specializes in environmental planning and design, and he and his associates have worked for just about everyone, from the governor of Caracas, Venezuela to the Bay Area Rapid Transit Dist.

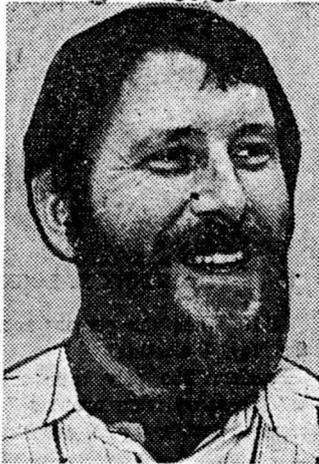
Baxter began his talk on Wednesday with a slide-show trip through a made-up city called Clintonia on the "Cronkite River" with an imaginary business acquaintance.

The scenes he showed could have been Buffalo.

There were endless stretches of freeways and parking lots. ("We have no transportation problems here. As you can see, 70 per cent of our downtown area is given over to cars.")

Ethnic Neighborhoods

There were ethnic neighborhoods. ("We're very proud of our ethics. They're very neat and clean. Of course, we ran a highway through the middle



Harold Baxter

... plans better cities

tle, a city split down the middle by a multilane highway. By late fall, his firm will have finished "Freeway Park," a six-acre park-plaza which "knits the city together again" over the freeway, with open spaces and cascades and walkways.

And there were slides of Omaha, where city residents working together have given top priority to a project which will link their downtown to the river's edge with a block wide, heavily landscaped, strip of parkland.

There have been failures, Baxter admitted. One project, designed for Harlem, "completely blew apart. They threw us out."

Made Available

But he is confident that money can be made available — funds which are perhaps now being put to use by cities in "unimaginative ways" for traffic improvement and beautification — to help cities revitalize themselves.

"There's no point in having a firm like ours come into a city and lay down a plan," he said. "If we do that, we'll go away, and the plan will go on the shelf. You can't force a plan like this on a community."

"You have to bring people together of all groups, government bureaucracies included, and give them participatory roles in planning," he said.

The forum series, sponsored by the Advertising Women's Club, Allentown Assn., Buffalo Area Chamber of Commerce, Buffalo Audubon Society, Capitol Hill Club Associates, Charles Burchfield Center, Erie County Medical Society, Federated Garden Clubs, Junior League of Buffalo, League of Women Voters, Rotary Club of Buffalo, Buffalo State College, WNY Nurserymen's Assn. and the Zonta Club

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put up a pedestrian walkway so they could get to their churches on Sunday.")

And there was a new stadium. ("It was originally supposed to cost \$32 million, but once we get it going, we ran the cost up to \$160 million. It's a great asset to our community. . . .

No, it's not exactly downtown, but it's only six or seven miles out of town.")

Then Baxter switched to slides of some of the cities where his firm has been hired to revitalize downtown areas.

Minneapolis Shown

There were shots of Minneapolis, where the Nicolett Mall, built in the mid-60's by the City Council, has turned a declining downtown main street into a gracious pedestrian walkway where vehicular traffic is limited to buses. The mall (besides being the scene of the opening sequence of the Mary Tyler Moore Show) has been credited with turning Minneapolis into one of the most prosperous cities in the country.

Baxter showed slides of Seat-

tum and the WNY Society of Internal Medicine, will continue at 4 p.m. next Wednesday in the Hotel Statler's Empire State Room.

Minneapolis, Cities
Baxter Shows