



TURNING POINT

1970 - 1979

Downtown planners had several successes in the 1970s, but it still seemed they were struggling against the natural trend of economic development — which was outside the city center.

The Hilton Hotel (later the Radisson) became the first major hotel built Downtown since the 1920s. The Indiana National Bank tower opened in 1970; the IUPUI campus was well under way and a few years later there was the Minton-Capehart federal building.

But the real action seemed to be moving elsewhere. Inspired by the success of Lafayette Square Mall, the city's first enclosed mall which opened in 1968, Castleton Square Mall opened in 1972. Then, in quick succession, Keystone at the Crossing debuted in 1973, and Washington Square Mall opened in 1974. It was clear that the natural trend in development did not include the city center.

If Downtown seemed anemic, the energy being invested into it was not. Mayor Richard Lugar pushed ahead with the implementation of Uni-Gov, the merger of city and county government functions, which he felt would make it easier for government to lead development. It became an era of proactive government, pushing projects like the Indiana Convention Center and saving the Indiana Theatre from the wrecking ball. City planners were sometimes seen as unrealistic dreamers of big ideas, like developing the water company's Downtown canal — or perhaps even building a Downtown shopping mall. There were plenty of skeptics, and some of the ideas did sound far-fetched at the time.

When the Indiana Pacers needed a new arena, it made sense to build it in the suburbs, which was the trend in other cities. But Lugar wanted it Downtown. Market Square Arena opened in 1974, and became a Downtown concert venue as well as the home of the Pacers. In 1977, MSA was the site of Elvis Presley's last concert.

From 1967 to 1976, the Pacers were part of the American Basketball Association, winning three ABA championships in 1970, '72 and '73, all of them played at the Fairgrounds Coliseum. Then the ABA folded and the Pacers were absorbed into the National Basketball Association. But the transition was costly

and the team faced a financial crisis. In 1977, a local television station conducted a telethon to sell season tickets, and the funds were raised to keep the team in Indianapolis.

Community involvement was also the basis for success for Indiana Black Expo, which started in 1971 and became an annual summertime event.

In 1974, The Indianapolis Star published a series of investigative stories about local police corruption. The Star's investigative team won the Pulitzer Prize for the series the following year.

On Feb. 8, 1977, Tony Kiritsis thrust himself forever into local crime lore when he wired a sawed-off shotgun to the neck of mortgage company executive Richard Hall and led him outside, surrounded by police and media. Upset over how he felt he had been treated by the mortgage company, Kiritsis held Hall at gunpoint for 63 hours before finally releasing him unharmed. At his trial, Kiritsis was found not guilty by reason of insanity.

And in 1978, four young employees of a Burger Chef restaurant in Speedway disappeared. Their bodies were found the next day in a wooded area of Johnson County. The murders were never solved.

By the late '70s, the economy was struggling with both inflation and recession. Large plants, such as Western Electric and Chrysler, which employed thousands, were soon to shut down.

Lugar had served two terms as mayor and was succeeded by William Hudnut, who shared the vision for what Downtown could become. Lugar's success had been to give the community a modern government structure, while Hudnut's early focus was to develop the Indianapolis economy. He seized on opportunities to expand the city's hospital system, pushed the city as a distribution center and enhanced Indianapolis as a convention site and sports center.

A revitalized Downtown still seemed like a pipe dream, and the poor economy did not provide much fuel for big projects. But near the end of the decade, in 1978, a little project to beautify Monument Circle won the hearts of the city. In those days the Circle was a place where the buses turned around and the Soldiers and Sailors Monument was off-limits to frivolous activities such as eating your lunch. That would change, brick by brick.

Opposite page: Women's liberation march through Indianapolis, August 1971.