

WHAT IT REALLY MEANS!

It soars an eighth of a mile into the sky, one third larger than New York's Rockefeller Center. It spreads for 14 acres along the Detroit River, the busiest waterway in the world.

A perfect setting for rebirth in a time when urban centers in the nation's industrial heartland — and elsewhere — are in serious trouble. It is fitting that the site is close to the landing place of Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, who founded Detroit 276 years ago.

The Renaissance Center: Today, as the total complex is dedicated, not even its originators, the corporations that financed the \$337 million project, say it is the total answer to the ills of the city. At worst, it could be an answer to the degree only that it symbolizes man's reaching for the heavens when he seemingly has no place else to go.

At best, it could have a magnet effect, luring massed people to the central city, reversing the blight that has attacked so many city hearts, spreading outward like a creeping fungus.

But it is a symbol of hope. Its wonder could serve as a signal to people living in affluence or blight that urbanites truly can master their own fate.

So it is more than a hotel with 1,400 rooms, more than windowed elevators looking out over the river and the city . . . a complex with four 39-story office towers surrounding a central 73-story hotel that by 1978 is scheduled to be a work place for 15,000 people.

It is more than a glamorous hotel with 13 restaurants, two ballrooms and perhaps the largest hotel exhibit area in the nation . . . more than a cluster of exclusive shops, or an attractive area just to sit, look at the river and muse.

Henry Ford II, who doggedly pursued the building of

the project and mustered major financial support from more than 51 businesses and corporations, using no government funds, has an answer for doubters:

"Without it Detroit would have become a freight yard and a collection of shacks in which to store things.

"The partners in the Renaissance Center at the very beginning hoped that it could serve as a catalyst. I don't think anyone felt it could turn the city around all by itself.

"We also need dwellings that keep people in the central city — both low and medium cost housing. Of course, we must get the crime rate down."

Detroit had become a city that virtually stops after 5 p.m. Ford compares it to Chicago:

"Chicago jumps. People who live downtown keep it alive after dark.

"We need this in Detroit. Our hope is that RenCen will spur this kind of development. If the people are there, business will be there."

If the Spirit of Detroit, the golden sculpture by Marshall Fredericks in front of the City-County Building, is a plea with arms outstretched, what is the Renaissance Center but mirrored buildings reaching up, beckoning people to come back?

Come back to the river and the center of the city which too many have given up on too quickly.

The sinew of Detroit has been its people; they comprise a restless community, sometimes brawling and cruel, but more often bubbling with energy and invention.

Time and the people will tell whether the beauty mark on the river can rekindle the spirit that built Detroit: a city that recognizably needs a vital boost, a renaissance.