

Lincoln Plaza - A Fading Landmark

Written by Steve Lackmeyer

Monday, 14 September 2009 03:48 - Last Updated Saturday, 07 November 2009 02:50



For 18 months, the sign outside the once grand Lincoln Plaza Forum simply read “change is coming.”

But would the arrival of a new Ramada Inn flag in 2001 and promises of \$1 million in renovations really bring the change that was needed?

The Lincoln Office Plaza, announced in 1967, was to be no ordinary office complex. Led by John Lewis, president of First Fidelity Corp., the 24-acre project was to include a hotel, trade mart and ample underground parking. Lewis estimated the development along Lincoln Boulevard at NE 42 would cost \$15 million. Everything was to be "ultra-modern" – including computers devoted to oil companies. Lewis proclaimed a trade mart at the complex would put Oklahoma City in competition with Dallas as a wholesale shipping hub.

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"There will be a lot of consolidation here of offices from all over the country because of the efficiencies made possible by this location and facilities," Lewis said. "That's the reason we've got to get going in a hurry."



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The trade mart idea had already faded from the headlines when the complex opened with a Quality Inn banner on July 15, 1970. The hotel featured 312 rooms, a dinner theater with a rotating stage, a 14,000-square-foot ballroom, and 17 meeting rooms.

At a time when downtown's aging hotels were either going bankrupt or being torn down by Urban Renewal, the Lincoln Plaza offered modern accommodations, ample meeting space and free parking. And through the early 1980s, the Lincoln Plaza was one of the city's premier hotels, hosting celebrities and dignitaries. Visitors included Elvis Presley, Muhamad Ali and President Ronald Reagan.



The Star dinner theater, meanwhile, provided visitors a chance to enjoy Las Vegas style shows

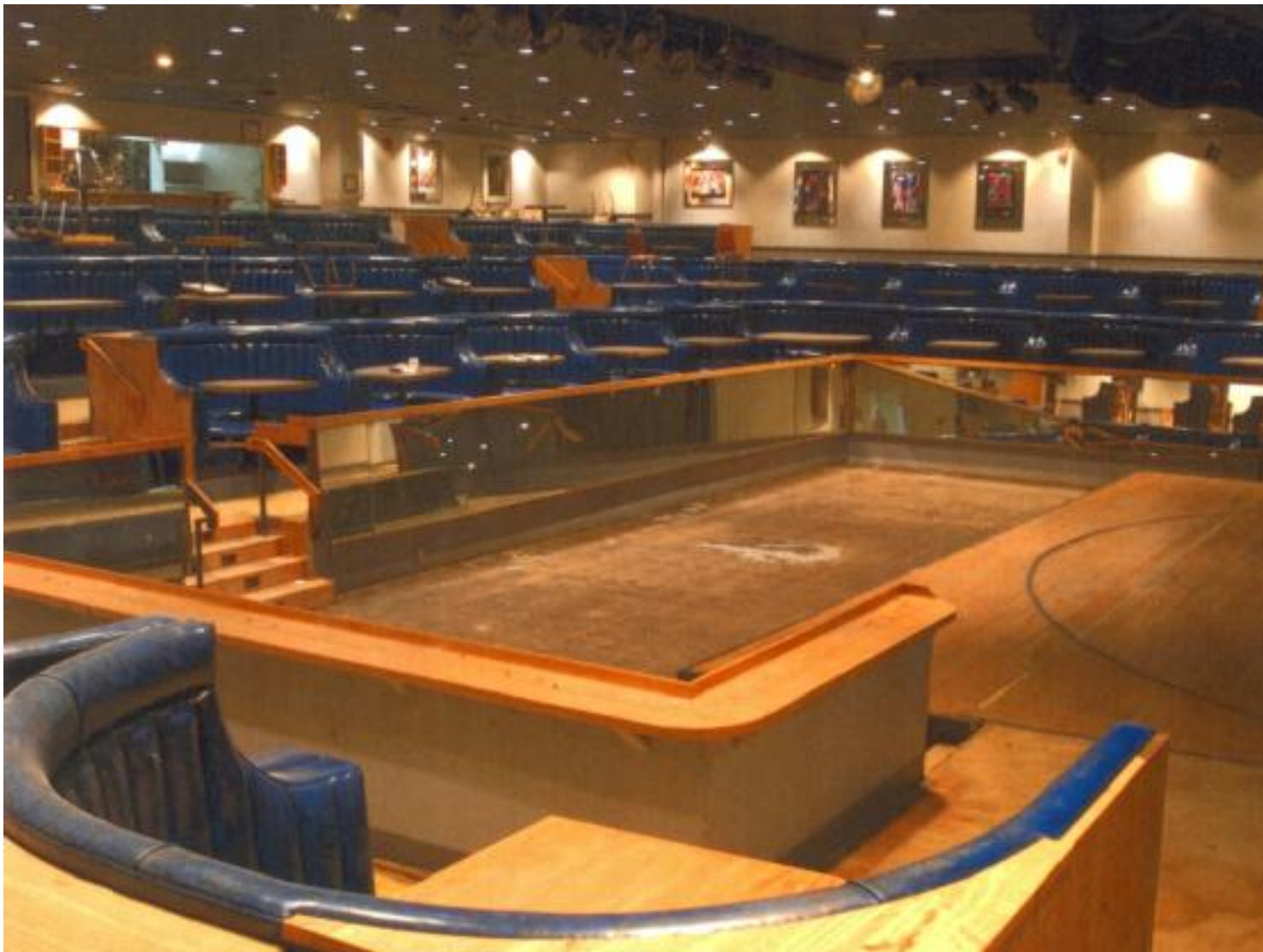
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while enjoying a meal and drinks. In 1984, the hotel was sold for \$20 million. But by then, trouble was already looming. The collapse of Penn Square Bank had triggered a severe economic depression throughout the state, and Lincoln Boulevard itself was beginning to look shabby.

The property frequently changed hands throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. Owners in 1991 promised an overhaul, and managed to bring in new furniture bought at auctions of the closed Heritage USA. That plan ended with a foreclosure in 1993.



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By the late 1990s, the dinner theater was a worn-out relic of another era. The hotel itself was hampered by the seedy decline of surrounding motels along Lincoln Boulevard that had fallen to hookers and drug dealers.

A plan pushed by Gov. Frank Keating the late 1990s razed all the seedy motels and cleaned up the corridor leading to the state Capitol. The project replaced a blighted corridor with a tree-lined boulevard that reserved the former motel sites for future state office buildings. Excitement was building as legendary coach Jimmy Johnson opened a Three Rings Grill at the base of the hotel tower. Suddenly the Lincoln Plaza had a theme restaurant intended to draw fans of the Dallas Cowboys coach.

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The hotel, however, continued its slow and almost unnoticed decline. Lawsuits were filed over the restaurant's operation and it eventually closed. The Ramada Inn banner disappeared almost as quickly as the Clarion Inn flag that preceded it. Developer Tom Parrish bought the property in 2006 for \$2 million, closed the hotel and quietly went to work on plans to restore the hotel's former glory. Parrish, press-shy by nature, declined to share his plan until the deal was complete. But an advertisement in the 2008 Oklahoma City visitors' guide provided the only glimpse of what Parrish was working on – a conversion into a Wyndham hotel that to date has yet to come to fruition.

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UPDATE: The guys at www.abandonedok.com toured the hotel for themselves!