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## FASHIONING A RENAISSANCE FOR DOWNTRODDEN DOWNTOWNS

By MICHAEL NORMAN

**NEW BRUNSWICK**— In many ways, it is a textbook case. A relatively prosperous city, a regional center for goods and services, falls victim to the urban flight of the 1960's. By the mid-1970's, downtown New Brunswick has the tired and shabby look of a town forgotten. Now, however, it is held up as a model of urban revitalization. Since 1977, more than \$200 million worth of projects have given the city not only a new facade but a promising economic base as well, development officials say.

With a population of 41,000 New Brunswick is anchored by two mammoth institutions: Rutgers, New Jersey's state university, and Johnson & Johnson, the pharmaceutical company. In 1975, two nonprofit development corporations were formed - the New Brunswick Development Corporation and New Brunswick Tomorrow, which organizes job training and other social programs. With some capital from Johnson & Johnson, the groups attracted government and private financing, hired consultants and architects, and called in the bulldozers.

Johnson & Johnson built a new \$50 million headquarters downtown and helped to finance a \$30 million Hyatt hotel and conference center. Early last year, plans were unveiled for an additional \$90 million in development, including a retail and office complex, a refurbishing of the railroad station and 800 units of new housing downtown. Despite the insistence of city officials that all of this has been a cooperative effort between government and private industry, a crucial guiding hand has been obvious from the start. "It could not have been accomplished without J & J," said Paul J. Abdalla, president of the New Brunswick Development Corporation. Some critics suggested that New Brunswick was getting its direction from a board room instead of city hall. Mayor John A. Lynch disagreed. "Nothing is done here without the total involvement of the city," he said.

David Harris, a leader in the city's black community, questioned whether the economic gains produced by the revival had helped those most in need. "We are told that the additional tax revenue will flow down to solve the problems of the poor and the unemployed, and that is an erroneous notion," he said. Still, even though city officials admit that it is difficult to "bootstrap up" the chronically unemployed, New Brunswick's unemployment rate did drop from 11.6 percent in 1982 to less than 6 percent in 1983, according to officials at the New Brunswick Development Corporation.

"I think everyone in the city wants a better downtown," said Susan Fainstein, a professor of urban planning at Rutgers. "But it's up to the city government to make sure the benefits are widespread."

map of New Brunswick; drawing