

A Way to Honor the Memory of Theodore R. McKeldin

By HIRSH GOLDBERG

No sooner would he finish lunch than he would immediately lead his luncheon guests to the large windows of the Center Club that looked out over the Inner Harbor. He would point out the rising horizon along the water's edge, where each of the buildings of the Inner Harbor Project would go and in what stage each of the buildings was then in. He would note in passing how he was born in South Baltimore not far from where the Inner Harbor was. He did not say it, but the impression and the message were loud and clear: Theodore Roosevelt McKeldin, twice Mayor of Baltimore and twice Governor of Maryland, was proudest above all of his vision and actions launching the largest building program in Baltimore history — the Inner Harbor Redevelopment Program.

As his press secretary during the final year and a half of his second term as Mayor of Baltimore — and as one who kept in close contact with him during his retirement from elected office — I was audience to his numerous thoughts and statements about the Inner Harbor Project. He had first espoused the idea in his 1963 inaugural speech as Mayor, noting that the Charles Center Project that had revitalized downtown Baltimore would not really be complete until it was extended to the ring of the Inner Harbor where the origins of Baltimore were and where the deterioration of the city had settled in the most.

It was that speech that launched the Inner Harbor Redevelopment Program and throughout his term as Mayor he placed that project above all others certainly in his mind and whenever he could in the scheme of municipal

priorities.

When his term expired and he was considering what to do, he tried to interest city fathers in his being given a more active role in the work on the project, but it now had become the time for the professionals. An ex-mayor, even one who had given birth

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to the idea, was not needed to the degree he had hoped.

But this did not stop him from walking the dusty, construction-strewn paths of the Inner Harbor, from talking up its importance to Baltimore's future vitality. He had, as Governor of Maryland, made the decision in the early 1950's to place the State Office Complex on Preston street as a way to launch the first urban renewal development in Baltimore. This had eventually spurred the Charles Center Project under his successor as Mayor, Thomas D'Alesandro, Jr., which was started in McKeldin's gubernatorial absence from Baltimore, but when McKeldin — after he had lost the Baltimore mayoralty in 1959 — won the mayoralty again in 1963, he immediately grasped the importance of achieving the natural conclusion of the urban renewal he had started in the 1950's and

that had been continued in Charles Center. His proposal was a rebuilding of Baltimore's Inner Harbor, a massive undertaking that dwarfed anything Baltimore had ever tried before.

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It was in fact so big that Baltimore could not have done it alone, and certainly not without McKeldin. There was a \$12 million bond issue — the largest in Baltimore history — to get passed and there was a need for \$22 million in federal funds to obtain.

The McKeldin charisma at the polls took care of the bond issue and the McKeldin friendship with then President Lyndon Johnson took care of the federal fund. The latter was done at a White House dinner when Johnson asked the Republican mayor who had come out openly for him against Barry Goldwater, what he could do for McKel-

din. McKeldin responded that he would like \$22 million for Baltimore's Inner Harbor project. "You got it, you got it," declared Lyndon, poking him in the arm, and the next day the Secretary of HUD, Dr. Robert Weaver, called McKeldin from Washington to say that "Mr. Mayor, I just happened to find that money you need."

November 20 would have been Theodore R. McKeldin's 74th birthday. At a time when there has been some tentative talk of a memorial for the man who held two of Maryland's most important offices for 16 years, Marylanders would do well to remember him in the way he would undoubtedly have loved.

The Inner Harbor program should be renamed the McKeldin Inner Harbor Redevelopment Program as a fitting honor for the man who made it possible.