

An Editorial

Fighting For A Priceless Asset

THERE they were — a handful of doughty figures trudging along Summit Street under a dank and chilly November sky behind their banner "Toledoans for an Open Waterfront."

Their numbers were small. Their voices were restrained. Their protest was orderly and quiet.

But the cause for which these citizens were united under the aegis of Betty Mauk, the genteel civic zealot from Ottawa Hills, is just. They are fighting to prevent a further despoiling of downtown Toledo's most priceless natural asset — its riverfront.

Specifically, the group is seeking to arouse grassroots anger over plans to close off the remaining open space along the waterfront in the SeaGate area. If already announced projects are carried out, it will mean construction of a hotel between Summit and the river, and shoehorning in a two-story retail complex between the hotel and Toledo Trust. It will also mean stretching another unsightly skywalk over Summit to a parking garage to be erected next to Trinity Church, adjacent to and under a planned twin-tower office building.

It is all a tragic mistake. Unless citizen wrath can dissuade Owens-Illinois in this SeaGate planning, Toledo will be taking a giant step backward to the days before urban renewal when the riverview was completely blocked off along Summit by a wall of commercial structures.

The opportunity to preserve the delights of river viewing is now. What would be built in the dwindling open area by thoughtless, egocentric interests which place a higher value on economics than on esthetics would stand for 100 years or longer. Toledoans now and in the future would get only flicker-

ing momentary glimpses of the Maumee whether walking or driving through the downtown area.

We can understand the desire to move worthy redevelopment projects ahead. Everyone wants that. But whatever else is done should be done right and in a way that will not ruin this city through myopic planning and closing off the riverfront with a wall of concrete, glass, and granite.

Owens-Illinois concluded that it needed a new world headquarters building, and it has built one at SeaGate. But it also has a responsibility — indeed, a self-interest, one would think — to contribute constructively to shaping the settings that will surround its new office structure.

How prudent is it to sink \$100 million into a tall and shiny world headquarters, only to see it flanked by a huge, unsightly parking structure, an ungainly TARTA bus shed, a superfluous office building, and possibly even a hotel and mini-shopping center squeezed into an area that would best be left undisturbed?

Such lack of vision is inexcusable. There is no reason that the projects being planned could not be built in the SeaGate area — but not on riverfront land that should be left forever as an open and refreshing extension of Promenade Park.

It may be wishful thinking, but there is still hope that the powers that be will awaken to their responsibility for rebuilding the heart of Toledo with taste, imagination, and foresight. At the very least, Betty Mauk and her hardy band of protesters may have pricked the corporate conscience and have given the citizens of this community a cause worthy of strong and enthusiastic support.