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BAY AREA FOCUS

City Hall Of Hope

Pittsburg puts past, future in new building

Fani Hansen strides to the front of the auditorium she designed, her paisley pants a rich burgundy hue that match the color of the chairs reserved for the public. It is a narrow room made spacious by walls of azure-blue glass. Outside to the north stretches the Sacramento-San Joaquin River; south, the green hills that climb toward Mount Diablo.

Hansen steps onto the dais, sits in the tall leather chair reserved at City Council meetings for the mayor of Pittsburg. She settles in. Looks out at the chamber.

And like a proud mother, she beams.

"I think this is absolutely glorious," proclaims the Tiburon architect. "The open environment will help them

make good decisions."

There's nothing old-fashioned looking about Pittsburg's new City Hall, a muscular steel-and-glass structure alongside Highway 4. During construction it was likened to a stadium, three stories of girders and columns that form a north-facing arc. Now, in a certain light it shimmers like a spaceship that just touched down.

But don't be deceived: It's a throwback to the days when hopeful architects saw buildings not just as boxes to be occupied, but as forces for good. Can a single creation, an \$18 million home for bureaucrats and police officers, lift up a city that has struggled for respectability for decades? For Hansen, who came of age in the '60s, the answer is a resounding "What else?"

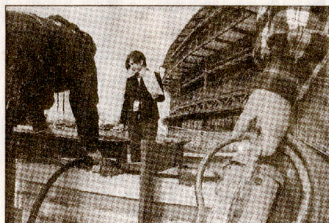
"It represents very much the city of Pittsburg, the history and the land and the diversity of the people," she says earnestly, no boasting. "It promotes togetherness."

The diminutive Bulgarian-born



JOHN KING

► **KING:** Page A18 Col. 1



Workers set the concrete bed for the monument that will display bronze medallions depicting the history of Pittsburg.

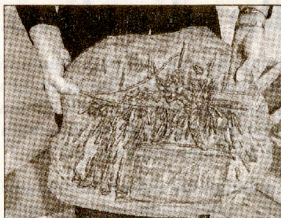


Photos by CHRIS STEWART / The Chronicle

Tiburon architect Fani Hansen oversaw the construction of a monument for Pittsburg's new City Hall, a steel-and-glass structure alongside Highway 4.

GRAND OPENING

The grand opening of Pittsburg City Hall will be held from 1 to 3 p.m. today at 65 Civic Ave., one block west of Railroad Avenue. Parking is available off Power Avenue.



One of the bronze medallions that was placed in the Pittsburg City Hall monument shows a scene from the city's steel-mill era.