

Independent Local Movie Theaters Struggle to Enter the Digital Age

By Sophie Braccini



The Lamorinda Theatres Foundation fundraising committee members at work: (From left) Ann O'Connell-Nye, Edy Schwartz, Shari Simon, Judi Kanter, Charlotte Holden

The New Rheem and Orinda Theatres must go digital. It is not a question of 'if' or 'when' – the big movie studios have already made that decision for them. The question is, can they afford the cost?

Going digital means an end to 35-millimeter film, which will result in big savings for the studios. Distributing a movie the old-fashion way means the

master print costs \$30,000 and the copies sent to movie theaters cost an additional \$3,000 each. When a big release is 5000 copies, going digital and sending movies to theaters virtually instead of on film engenders savings in the millions of dollars a year.

So, digital is the way of the future – the very near future, since major studios such as Disney and Fox have set an April, 2012 deadline for theaters to convert to digital. The cost of the new equipment? \$80,000 per screening room. For the California Independent Film Festival Association (CAIFFA), which operates the Orinda and New Rheem Theatres with a combined total of seven screens, that's a \$560,000 investment.

"The movie industry is undergoing a transformative revolution," says CAIFFA President Derek Zemrak, "the relatively simple, 120-year old technology that used perforations is giving way to binary digits."

Many independent movie theaters may become collateral damage of the conversion. "Independent movie theaters such as ourselves represent 20 percent of the film distribution venues,

the rest being large exhibition networks (such as Cinemark with 448 theaters, including Century 14 in Walnut Creek)" adds Zemrak, "the studios have figured out that about half of that 20 percent will convert to digital; losing the other 10 percent may not be their main concern."

Studios will help those who convert at least half of their screens by April, 2012 by crediting them back some of the money they receive for the films (studios get an average of 50 percent of the ticket sales for each movie they send to theaters). "The plan is to convert two screens in Moraga and two in Orinda in 2012," says Zemrak, "that's a \$280,000 investment. We hope to raise half of it, and finance the rest with the studios' back-credit."

If the theaters cannot convert, they will not be able to present the new releases that attract a large percentage of customers to the movies. "We would still be able to show classic movies, independent releases and foreign films," says Zemrak, "but it is unlikely that it would be enough to fill the seven rooms we have and generate enough revenue to keep the theaters alive."

So if the Lamorinda community wants to keep its theaters, it will have to help.

A fundraising committee has been formed to raise \$140,000 for the new Lamorinda Theatres Foundation, which will own the equipment. Residents of all three communities have joined together in this effort—Orinda's Ann O'Connell-Nye, Moraga residents Shari Simon, Edy Schwartz, Judi Kanter, and Charlotte Holden of Lafayette.

A membership drive is underway;

becoming a member will sustain the Association, provide funds for the new equipment, and of course provide benefits to the members. The committee's first task was to beef-up the perks. "We wanted the three levels of membership to bring more advantages," says Schwartz, "all members will continue to go to the movies in the two locations for \$6 anytime, and for the Supporting and Leading members other perks have been added such as free admission to many events, including part of the California Independent Film Festival that's coming up in February."

The group is also seeking large corporate and individual sponsors. Other supporters of the local theaters are doing their part to help. "I would like to believe that if the citizens of Lamorinda simply knew what is happening, they would rally together to save our theatres," says Moraga resident and theater supporter Joan Edelson. Putting her energy where her mouth is, Edelson is seeking out Lamorinda restaurants to organize one or more dinners and donate a percentage of the profits to the theaters.

"We have to be able to show the big, popular movies as they are released," says Zemrak, "The new technology could bring the opportunity for us to show more new movies sooner. Our survival depends on whether or not Lamorinda wants to continue to have great local entertainment that profits the whole community." For more information or to become a member go to www.CAIFF.org.

Lamorinda Weekly business articles are intended to inform the community about local business activities, not to endorse a particular company, product or service.

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business briefs

New Gift and Toy Store Coming Soon to Moraga

L Silhouettes Gift Shop

518 Center Street (in the Rheem Center)

It took ten minutes for the Planning Commission to approve Guadalupe Torres' application to open a retail gift shop in the Rheem Center next to Royal Siam. L Silhouettes Gift Shop will sell gifts, including toys and jewelry, and offer gift-wrapping services. The proposed hours of operation are 10am- 6pm, seven days a week. Torres plans to open before the holidays. Dave Schnayer, representing Kimco Realty Corporation, said that the Torres' have extensive retail experience as managers, but that this store is their first personal venture. "They are putting their heart and soul into this," he said, "I wish them success."

Grand Opening!
Flying A Gas Station
22 Bryant Way, Orinda
(by the eastbound entrance to Highway 24)



Allen Pennebaker

Photo Sophie Braccini

Allen Pennebaker, the owner of Orinda Motors, seemed to be in several places at one time for the Grand Opening Celebration of his new Flying A Gasoline of Orinda on Friday the 1st and Saturday the 2nd of December. "This is a very busy day," said Pennebaker on Saturday afternoon, "a lot of people have been coming and they love that we are the cheapest gas in Orinda and that we will pump it for them." Flying A's gas stations almost disappeared in the sixties and only recently the company that owns that name, Royal Petroleum, decided to re-start a network in the Bay Area. "I love that logo," said Pennebaker, "at the time we decided to start a gas station in Orinda this opportunity became available and we jumped on it." Joseph Torbati manages the station's detailing service: "Allen found me at a detail shop somewhere else," said Torbati, "here I do not have to be too fast and turn high volume; I can do the work my way, using a tooth brush when necessary."

New Optometry Center in Orinda
Visual Entrée Optometry

2 Theatre Square, Suite 114, Orinda

386-0258, www.visualentreeoptometry.com

What does 'Entrée' have to do with optometry? A lot, according to Dr. Stephanie Lee who opened a new complete service optometry center in Orinda this fall. In her new facility, with the help of her sister Jessica, who is an Optician, Lee provides a full range of optometric services including comprehensive eye examinations and contact lens fittings. Additionally, she can advise interested clients on preventative and maintenance care through nutrition. "Systemic

health issues such as uncontrolled imbalances of blood pressure, blood sugar, and blood cholesterol levels can all impact eye health and in some cases lead to severe vision loss," she says, "prevention is the best prognosis and utilizes new technologies to detect changes earlier. Maintaining a healthy body is an initial step towards good eye health."

Santa's Secret Wrapping Room

5A Rent-a-Space

455 Moraga Road, Ste. F

From December 1st through 23rd, in Santa's Secret Wrapping Room, 5A offers free colorful paper, ribbons, tape and everything needed to wrap holiday gifts; they also provides coloring and fun activities for children. The hours are 9am-5pm daily. On Sunday, December 18th, Santa will come to 5A for free pictures, a holiday photo frame, cocoa, treats, fun events and crafts, 11am-3pm.

Mark Your Calendar for ROC's 2nd Anniversary

2 Theater Square, Orinda

On Saturday, December 10th Republic of Cake proprietors Peter McNiff and Chih-Chung Fang invite the community to come and celebrate their second 'birthday.' The party will take place 2- 4pm with music, fun, a bouncy house and, of course, a variety of their famous cupcakes.

News from the three Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette

Wednesday, December 14, Holiday Mixer at Bank of the West, 3583 Mt. Diablo Blvd., 5:30-7pm. There will be food, fun, beverages and the big holiday raffle.

Moraga

On November 18 Edy Schwartz gave her farewell address as President of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce. Schwartz was president for four years and under her mandate the membership grew from 25 to 150 members. "It is the people who gave their time that made the difference," she said. Schwartz is foremost a community organizer; according to many volunteers she has drafted, "It is hard to say no to Edy!" Under her leadership were born multiple initiatives, including Lamorinda's first shop-local campaign, the Community Faire and a new synergy with St. Mary's College. Schwartz believes it is time to pass the baton. "Different people with different abilities are needed at different times," she says, "I am a community person, now the Chamber needs to be led by a more business-oriented individual, and we are very fortunate that Frank Melon, the Executive Director of the Moraga Country Club, stepped up."

Orinda

Thursday, December 8th, Chamber Holiday Mixer at Mechanics Bank, 77 Moraga Way, 5:30-7pm.

Mark Your 2012 Calendar ...The Chamber's Orinda Country Club Luncheon is scheduled for Friday, February 24, noon to 1:30pm at the Orinda Country Club, 315 Camino Sobrante. The cost is \$30 per person. The luncheon's speaker will be award-winning weekend anchor for NBC Bay Area News, and Orinda resident, Diane Dwyer.

If you have a business brief to share, please contact **Sophie Braccini** at sophie@lamorindaweekly.com