

Published January 13, 2016

One-Year Reprieve for Rheem Theatre

By Sophie Braccini

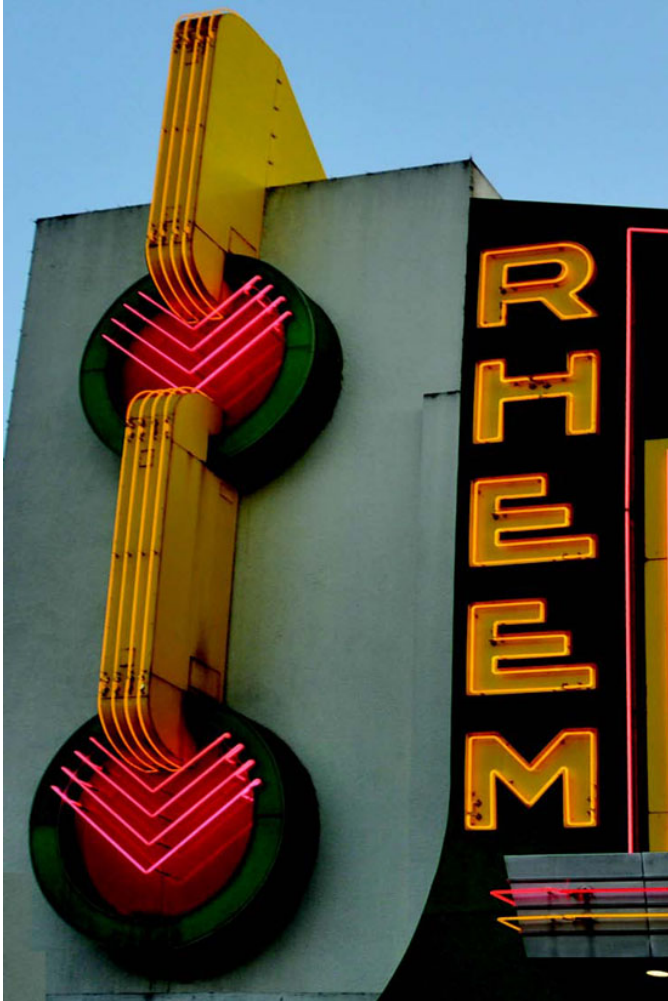


Photo A. Scheck

Over the holidays a new Rheem Theatre drama unfolded. By mid-December Derek Zemrak and Leonard Pirkle, the present operators of the business, thought the theater would close, but Zemrak exacted a final agreement on Christmas Eve, securing one more year for the historic theater. The property is still for sale, however, and the long-term survival of the theater is not secured. The new Moraga Community Foundation will step up in 2016 to support the local cultural asset.

Rumors began among local cinema lovers in the last weeks of December, with closure dates of the Rheem Theatre circulating within the community. "When Mahesh Puri proposed a new lease for just one year with unsustainable conditions for us, we decided we would have to close by January," said Zemrak. When he told the studios that the theater would close by the end of January, their response was that they would stop supplying movies by Jan. 13. The community once again braced for the potential loss of the theater.

But Zemrak did not give up. He and Pirkle also manage the Orinda Theatre, and they run the California Independent Film Festival in both locations - as well as at the Castro in San Francisco. And they have invested a lot at the Rheem, adding new seats, three digital projectors, and the Classic Film Hall of Fame and Museum that includes Zemrak's lifelong collection of cinema memorabilia. They returned to the negotiating table.

"Mahesh Puri and I came to a 12-month agreement on Christmas Eve morning," said Zemrak. The theater has been on a month-to-month lease for the past 18 months, and Zemrak has been working with Puri to secure a longer-term lease. "The Rheem Theatre will remain open through 2016. This 12-month extension will give the Moraga Community Foundation more time to develop a long-term plan for the Rheem Theatre. A great holiday gift for the Lamorinda area."

"Since last summer we were hoping that the operator would be able to sign a lease agreement and the Rheem Theatre could stay open while a long-term solution could be found," said Andy Scheck for the foundation. "The Moraga Community Foundation has finished the setup process and is waiting for the approval from the IRS on its nonprofit status. We are looking forward to working with the community and raising money that will help secure the future of the Rheem Theatre."

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA