

POINTS OF VIEW

B'ham theater looks to be a one-of-a-kind treat

See you at the movies. The movie theater magnates obviously think they will.

The eight-screen Birmingham Theatre opens later this month in the heart of downtown Birmingham with seating for 1,200 film-goers.

The 20-screen, 6,000-seat Star Theatre has settled its legal difficulties and is expected to break ground in Southfield this June and open sometime next spring.

AMC's version of the 20-screener, seating audiences totalling 4,000, is up for a May 14 public hearing in Livonia.

I'm guessing that going to the movies at one of these 20-screen complexes will be, well, like going to a mall.

And, I'm guessing that going to the movies at the Birmingham Theatre will be, well, like going to a one-of-a-kind theater in a one-of-a-kind town.

That's because its owners — Birmingham residents David and Carol Hitch

Trupeck — are tailoring the theater physically and artistically to the residents of Birmingham and surrounding communities.

Outside, it already has retrieved some of Birmingham's history, with the marquee a replica of the theater's original 1927 sign.

As for the inside, designed by the Birmingham firm of Victor Saroki and Associates, word has it that love seats and baby-changing stations (babies at the movies, oh, oh, hope they're sound sleepers!), a balcony and upscale concession stand are only a sampling of its beauty and comforts.

Artistically, it will offer something for everyone — first-run, family and art films presented with state-of-the-art equipment, reels off an excited Ruth Daniels.

Daniels, a Farmington Hills resident, was hired away from the Mopie Theatre to be the Birmingham's general manager. Dying to see a movie on a rainy Thurs-



JUDITH DONER BERNE

day afternoon? Plans are to offer daily matinees as well as midnight showings on Friday and Saturday nights, Daniels says.

Charity benefits and a birthday party package, including a movie preceded or followed by pop, party favors, cake and bubbly in a lounge at the top of the escalator, are already being booked.

Even educators from the Birmingham

Public Schools have talked about moving a Parent-Child Night from the school to the theater.

Daniels, who won national acclaim for programs that extend the film experience for audiences, is preparing that kind of interaction for the Birmingham.

Look for "An Evening With..." a monthly event featuring area people who work in the industry, such as novelist Elmore (Dutch) Leonard or screen writer Kurt Luedike.

Watch for a weekly film discussion group, as yet unnamed. It will meet, says Daniels, at the Lonestar Coffee House next door to exchange views over capuchino on the movie just seen.

Daniels isn't fazed by the bigger box, chain theaters which have plans to include restaurants and other attractions within their walls. She thinks there's a large enough film audience to go around. And, as an independent theater, "We can be much more personal."

"In reality what these big box theaters are trying to emulate is a downtown," she

says. "Birmingham already has that atmosphere."

After all, restaurants and coffee houses, art galleries and antique shops, clothing and furniture stores already line the blocks surrounding the theater.

Plus, parking, perceived as a problem in daytime Birmingham, has been addressed. An existing parking deck behind the theater has been practically attached to a side entrance. Another structure is a block away.

The Birmingham also has the advantage of a head start, opening almost a full-year ahead of the mega-competitor.

See you at the movies.

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former managing editor of the Eccentric Newspapers. You can comment on this column at (313)953-2047, Ext. 1997 or by writing or faxing (810-644-1314) a letter to the editor of this newspaper.

Term limits: Good on paper, not so good in practice

On paper, term limitation looks good. Citizen participation, not career politicians. Fresh ideas. Government close to the people. Rah!

But some people who see government up close are beginning to see severe problems, particularly in the state House of Representatives, where a three-term limit kicks in in 1998.

Paul Hillemonds, retiring speaker of the House, said last week that three terms, six years, are too short. By losing veterans, the House will lose its "institutional memory" — a fancy way of saying that those who don't remember the past are doomed to repeat it.

Future speakers and committee chairs will be members with only four years experience. The day they take their leadership posts, Hillemonds said, they'll be "lame ducks." He wondered aloud whether the House will be able to do long-term thinking if members will be gone in six years.

House members will be more dependent on staff and lobbyists, he said.

They will be pushed around more easily by the governor.

Hillemonds reminded me of former Rep. Bill Keith of Garden City. Keith spent many years working on a reform of Michigan's branch banking and interstate banking laws, only to have then-Gov. James Blanchard veto his bill late in the session.

Keith put in two more years whipping it into shape. And Keith is but one example.

Hillemonds could have run one more term in his safe Holland district but chose to retire at the end of 1996 "for the good of my district." His successor will have one term of seniority when the full impact of term limits hits the House in 1998 and will be better positioned for leadership when 95 new state representatives come to town.

David Adamany, president of Wayne State University, warned lawmakers to devise a formula for funding universities PDQ, so that the higher education



TIM RICHARD

So it looks like universities are in for pork-barrel chaos after 1998. My own study of House voting patterns convinces me we will have more ideological and partisan splits when junior members take over.

budget doesn't become a matter of political bargaining after 1998.

"With term limits, institutional memory will disappear from the state capitol, and funding arrangements are likely to become highly unpredictable and even chaotic," Adamany said.

"We will regret the day we voted in term limits," agreed Sen. John Schwarz, R-Battle Creek, who chairs the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on the higher education budget.

Actually, lawmakers have been trying to devise a formula, based on program offerings and student numbers, for decades — unsuccessfully.

So it looks like universities are in for pork-barrel chaos after 1998. My own study of House voting patterns convinces me we will have more ideological and partisan splits when junior members take over.

Remember the school finance reform package that voters overwhelmingly fa-

vored 2-1 in 1994? If it had been up to the freshmen and sophomores, many of the tax bills never would have passed. Lawmakers with three terms and more of seniority were able to reach bipartisan compromise. They had time to think in broad, statewide terms.

Michigan has been a middle-of-the-road state for many generations. The hard-nose conservatism of low-seniority Republicans and the bleeding-heart liberalism of low-seniority Democrats doesn't match the way Michigan voters behave.

Three terms are too few for state representatives. Ten terms are too many because one becomes a law unto himself, arbitrary and jaded. Five terms — one full turn of the census clock would be far better.

Unfortunately, we shall be well into the 21st Century before most people figure it out.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events.

Budget, tuition squabbles put Engler in tough bind

Gov. John Engler gets back from Europe this week. Between jet lag, recent stories suggesting he no longer is a top pick for vice president and a first-class problem with his budget, he may wish he never had gone away.

Time cures jet lag. There's nothing Engler can do about the vice presidential nomination; it's Bob Dole's call. But Engler can do something about the budget mess, although don't hold your breath.

The seeds for the budget problem were sown last February, when the Engler Administration assumed Congress and President Clinton would enact welfare reform along the lines that the governor had been pushing in Washington, thus saving the state some \$320 million.

That hasn't happened, and nobody I talk to thinks it will happen any time soon. So, the Engler budget is \$320 million short, right off the bat. When legislators got back from their Easter vacation last week, people started noticing there was a problem.

According to Engler, who certainly doesn't want a budget crisis blowing up in the middle of his campaign for vice president, there's no cause for worry. "I'm prepared to wait some time. I think this could go on throughout the year," he said.

According to folks in the Legislature who now have the responsibility to enact some kind of budget, time already is running out. "At some point, we've got to say welfare reform simply isn't going to happen; let's look at the alternatives," said Sen. John Schwarz, chair of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on higher education.

Here's an example of why people are getting nervous: Engler's original budget proposal called for a 6 percent increase for colleges and universities. That got the governor a lot of good ink about being a friend of colleges and universities, especially when he looked as though this level of state support would keep tuition increases at a low 2-3 percent for the year.

That hurts a lot of people. Parents of kids going to college, for one. Engler's good friend, Michigan State University President Peter McPherson, for another.

McPherson made a big deal last year about holding MSU's tuition increase below the rate of inflation, and if Engler's original budget gets busted, McPherson winds up with egg all over



PHILIP POWER

his face. The preliminary posturings already are taking place on what could be as big a fight over higher education appropriations as last year's.

Engler's flacks are saying the whole thing is President Clinton's fault, which is partly true. Conservatives, including the editorial page at the Detroit News, are arguing that the thing to do is hold the lid on spending, regardless. University presidents are wringing their hands.

Democrats are gloating that, at last, Engler finds himself in a box. There is great logic to start figuring out "what if," especially when it comes to things like college tuition. But I doubt the political realities — Engler's conservative base, mixed with his political ambition — will allow people to do any such thing. Instead, expect the pressure to build, the rhetoric to heat up.

I expect it won't be until a lame duck session of the Legislature — well after Engler is or is not nominated for vice president; well after the election determines what party controls next year's Legislature and after some more numbers are in — that it all will be sorted out. In the meantime, college presidents will have a tough time figuring out what to bill parents for tuition.

If I had a kid in college, I'd be suggesting a high-paying summer job.

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