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price significantly in an effort to once again save the Civic from closing. At this time first-run theaters were charging \$3.50, and our admission was \$2.50 (the same price as today compared to prices for first runs at as much as \$9 today). The answer to this business decline was: all seats \$1.25 seven days a week.

The Civic entered another robust era of success which allowed the installation of much-needed new projection equipment, Dolby Stereophonic Sound system reupholstering of the seats, new drapery, carpet and the addition of a second exit for the balcony.

Success, as always, is riddled with the threat of new challenges, as proved the case again in the late 1980's. The Civic faced a new crisis as the advent of cable television emerged, along with the tremendous upsurge in the home video market and the continuing expansion of more multiplex theatres throughout the trade area.

I confronted this onslaught by approaching the Rose family with an offer to purchase the building. I had to buy the building to do the construction necessary to expand the Civic to a two-screen theater. This was the

only way I could see the Civic would survive. Fortunately the Rose family did sell me the theater building. Construction started in early December, 1989, to convert the balcony into a separate auditorium. The Civic was closed for the first time in its history for a five-week period with the remodeling project being completed in mid-January 1990. The change to a twin-screen theater proved successful and the Farmington Civic was once again alive with patrons.

It has taken creative flexibility to keep up with the continuing expansion of multiplex theaters in the Farmington Civic's market area. The addition of live entertainment including The Gaylords, Gallagher II, Soupy Sales and Michael Winlow, as well as, East Indian movies on weekends in five different dialects (India produces more feature films than any country in the world), and several corporate rentals provided the boost for the theater to remain financially viable in the face of competition from the super mega movieplexes.

Decision to sell

Last year I faced the reality that the Civic was enter-

ing a new era, an era in which it would need the infusion of major investment to make capital improvements to survive. Specifically, the theater needs new seating and main floor restrooms, all of which are beyond the scope of my financial resources as a small entrepreneur. I had been approached by several parties who had shown interest in buying the theatre. However, I felt a strong obligation to let city officials know of my decision to sell before responding to any potential buyers. After all, the Civic is integral to downtown Farmington, and my family has been a part of this community for a long time. In September, 1998, I approached Frank Lauffhoff, the Farmington city manager, to inform him of my decision to put the theater on the market. Mr. Lauffhoff surprised me by asking if I would consider selling the Civic to the city. He explained that longterm "visioning" studies had addressed this possibility. Mr. Lauffhoff said they would need at least seven or eight months to conduct research on the feasibility of the city buying the Civic. I felt sure that the longterm survival of the Civic would rest in this

approach and agreed to enter into this process with the city.

The result of the research and negotiating process is now history. The Farmington Civic Theatre, is entering into a new exciting era. The theater truly will reflect the pride of the community which it has served more than the past 69 years. As I pass the theater's torch to the city, I feel a sense of privilege to have been associated with the Civic. I would like to thank the people of Farmington and all of the surrounding suburbs for their support over these 69 years. My hope is that the Farmington Civic will continue to provide entertainment as well as historical nostalgia for all who grace its doors for many, many years to come.

On behalf of my late father, myself, my daughter Jennifer, and my son Jason - three generations of Hohlers - I thank you for being loyal patrons and as such part of The Farmington Civic Theatre family.

Now showing: Matinees

By TIM SMITH
FRANK WATZLA
tsmith@oe.homedomain.net

The new owners of the Civic Theatre are moving in. Former owner Greg Hohler is moving out. So is the Bead Bohemia.

One spinoff development of the Civic's \$318,500 sale from Hohler to the city of Farmington is the move of Bead Bohemia to retail space in the Village Mall, on the southeast corner of Grand River-Farmington roads.

The new location for Bead Bohemia is the former space of Downtown Farmington Travel. The travel agency recently moved to an office at 23829 Liberty Street, now sharing space with Omega Travel.

Bead Bohemia was required to move from its longtime spot next door to the Civic, to open up room for expansion of the theater lobby and installation of bathrooms.

The renovations are part of a massive, \$300,000 theater upgrade planned by M.K.A., Inc. of Wilson, M.K.A. was hired in July by the city council, to manage the theater.

On Tuesday, the day before the sale to the city was to have been finalized, Hohler said he still felt good about his decision to leave the theater business. The Civic was owned by the Hohler family from 1940 until yesterday.

"I'm not the least bit depressed or anxious, I'm excited," Hohler said. "I know this is the right decision for me, and for the city."

Bead Bohemia, which was expected to re-open this week, found its new space almost by accident.

According to Mary Sitaras, Downtown Farmington Travel co-owner and agent, she had to get out of her Village Mall lease early, after her partner decided to leave the agency for personal reasons.

Sitaras determined that it would be too much of a financial hardship to, as sole proprietor, maintain her lease in the mall. And she already had a good business relationship with Omega Travel. The two agencies will work side-by-side.

"It all worked out," Sitaras said.

Matinees return

The new ownership regime of the Civic Theatre just began yesterday. And it didn't take long for an old-time movie tradition to be brought back to the facility. Weekend matinees will be returning this weekend, said Farmington City Manager Frank Lauffhoff.

"The idea here is to make it family friendly," Lauffhoff said.

Matinee ticket prices will be \$2.50; \$1.50 for those age 12 and under.

"Big Daddy" and "Tanaway Bride" will be featured at 2 p.m. and 4:20 p.m. Saturday and at 2:45 p.m. and 6 p.m. Sunday.

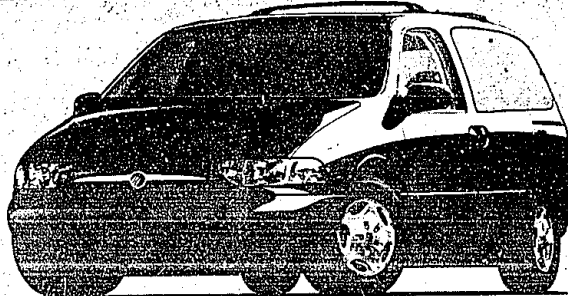
Hohler discontinued weekend matinees several years ago.

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