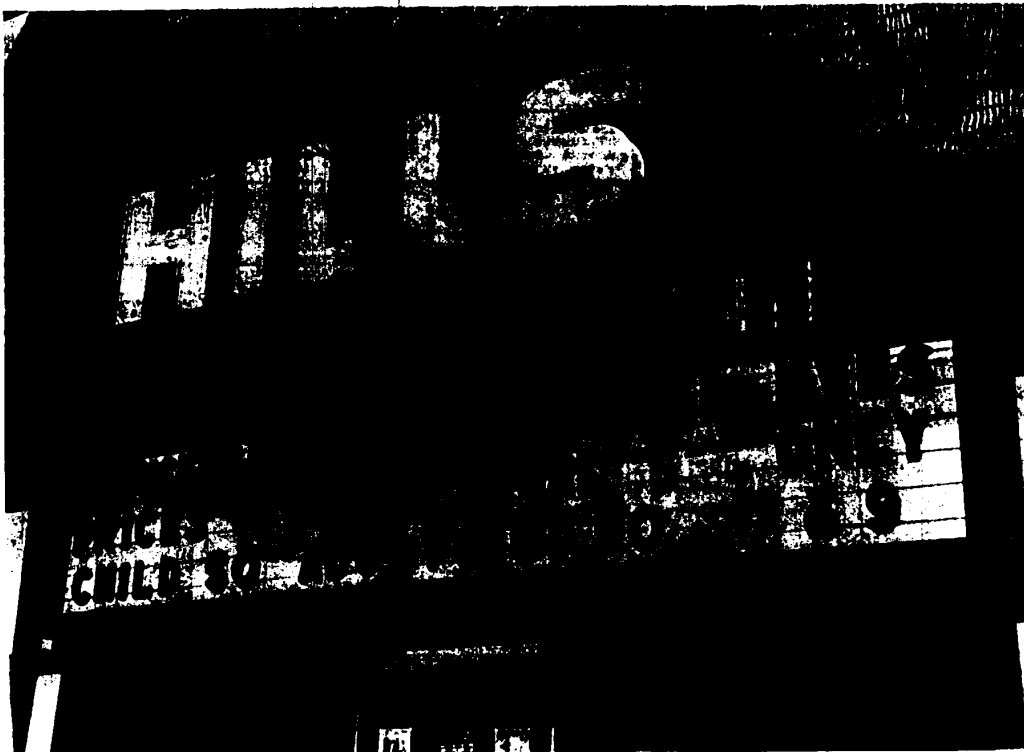


Some theaters have cut admission prices to attract more people. Owners of three theaters are pleased with the response.



Rochester's Hills' owner says he will keep reduced-rate admission policy. (Staff photo)

# Theaters view low prices favorably

By SUE ROSEK

that have been out for some time or are being re-released.

Although the Civic was never hurting for customers, a few seats were always empty, said Hohler. "And, empty seats never do us any good." Because of the reduced prices, he said the Civic has gathered a previously left-out market—retirees and families feeling the economic pinch.

"Now a family of four can be entertained for about two hours for \$5. Compared to other activities and other theater prices, that is fairly reasonable."

"Also, we don't feel we've hurt any of the first-run theaters. Our clientele is primarily persons who can sit and wait to see a picture. They don't have to be the first one in the neighborhood to see a film."

The senior Hohler, who has owned the Civic for more than 40 years, said the Civic always has drawn customers from throughout the metropolitan area, and he couldn't estimate what the \$1.25 admission price has done to attract patrons from other Farmington. But customers are happy with the prices, he said, and often tell him so as they are coming in or leaving the theater.

"The reduction is partly a selfish motive," explained the senior Hohler. "We wanted to increase our volume and figured with the high cost of everything else it would be advantageous to us and our audience to reduce prices."

"The Farmington Civic, 3332 Grand River, has 700 seats, many of which were vacant during showtime because of \$3 and \$4 tickets and are now filled," adds the younger Hohler.

"We're happy with the results and so are our patrons. We plan to continue the policy," he says.

The Farmington Civic does not show first-run films such as "Jaws," explained Hohler. "We deal primarily with subsequent run features—movies

compete with the large theaters that offer first-run movies such as "Jaws," because of the sheer expense."

Since the \$1.25 ticket price went into effect, the Civic's schedule has included "Harry & Tonto," "Young Frankenstein," "The Sting," and currently "Return of the Pink Panther."

"You could say we play outstanding pictures even if they are not first-run," said the elder Hohler. "We don't allow X-rated films, and we offer matinees on Saturday and Sunday, when a Disney film or other suitable children's movie is playing."

In Plymouth, Penn Theater owner-manager Margaret Wilson charges \$1 for all persons Sundays through Thursdays, and on Fridays and Saturdays adults pay \$2 and children \$1.

"We started the reduced-rate admission policy in May and figured the time was right and felt it would mean something."

"In order to do this, we've had to double the number of adult admissions, and so far it's been encouraging. In July we reached the break-even point, and if we can maintain it, we'll keep the low admission rates."

Besides offering patrons a bargain, Ms. Wilson said she is fulfilling her role in the community. "We're now showing good movies to twice as many persons."

Like the Farmington Civic, the Penn, 700 Penniman in downtown Plymouth, shows mainly subsequent and saturation-run movies. "We couldn't imagine having a first-run re-

lease. It would cost too much, and we couldn't offer low prices."

In recent months, the Penn has offered "Four Musketeers," "Airport 75," and "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore."

Films scheduled for later this summer include "Benji," and "Towering Inferno." Both previously had major runs.

"In September we'll be picking up 'Lenny' and 'Shampoo,'" but during the summer we try to keep more suitable entertainment for youngsters on the screen."

The community's response to low prices was immediate and very favorable, Ms. Wilson said. "I received many thank you letters, and people would stop me on the street to say how much they appreciated it."

The Penn holds 700 persons and since the price reduction, Ms. Wilson has noticed more families coming to the show. "It's cheaper now to bring the kids rather than leave them home with a babysitter."

An alternative to cutting prices is splitting the screen and offering two theaters, but Ms. Wilson prefers a spacious auditorium and wide screen and has no plans to change it.

In Rochester, residents can view even first-run films for as low as \$1.50 for adults and 50 cents for children.

Owner-manager Patrick McNeill said he revamped the Hills' price schedule about a month ago because "I felt other theaters were charging exorbitant prices for movies."

McNeill, who bought the Hills, 416 Main St., in downtown Rochester in April, said the reduced prices have worked out fairly well. "We hope in the long-run it will increase business. It hasn't yet, dollar wise, but it has patron-wise."

McNeill said he has scheduled such first-run films as "Dove," and the current attraction "Russian Roulette," but he can't compete with the major theater chains which are showing "Jaws."

"After I bought the theater I closed for about a month for cleaning and repairs. I thought 'Towering Inferno' would be a good picture to open the new theater. The film company promoting the picture wanted a \$10,000 deposit. I can't afford that."

Besides the traditional evening movie, McNeill offers a midnight special every first and third Saturday of All seats are \$1.25 for films featuring W.C. Fields, Marx Brothers, the original "Frankenstein," and others.

McNeill, who has been in the theater business for about 10 years, said he'll keep his reduced-rate admission policy and plans to expand and develop his schedule.

Several theaters in the Observer & Eccentric area, operated by major chains are offering reduced rates but only at certain times.

The Quo Vadis in Westland, and La Parisian in Garden City, both part of Wayne Amusements Company, offer

The Observer & Eccentric

## BUSINESS

Thursday, July 31, 1975

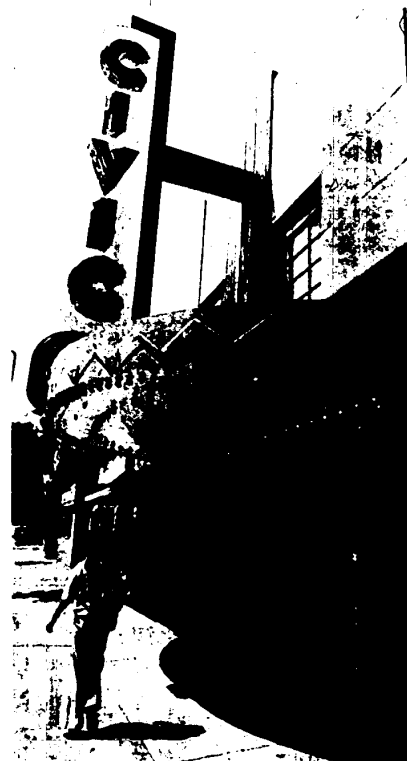
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matinees every Wednesday for \$1 and have special senior citizen rates.

The Terrace in Livonia, Village in Birmingham, Northland in Southfield and Abbey I and II in Troy offer special rates for youths 13-15 on PG or G rated movies, according to Bill

Markus of Suburban Detroit Theaters Inc.

Theater chains offering first-run movies such as "Jaws" could not afford to operate charging across-the-board reduced admission prices, he said.



Farmington Civic attracts previously left-out market. (Staff photo)



Edward (left) and E. Gregory Hohler started Civic's reduced-rate policy. (Staff photos)