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## Ticket-sales pledge is sought to keep Sun City theater open

By JOHN HARRIGAN

SUN CITY — Town Meeting Association members who have protested the closure of Alco Theater were told Thursday they must promise written support to keep the action alive.

John W. Meeker, president of Del E. Webb Development Company (DEVCO), told Rotary Club members here Wednesday the company will continue to lease space to the theater at cost if the association would promise in writing to sell movie tickets for the hospital auxiliary.

Boswell Memorial Hospital auxiliary has helped support the theater and itself by selling tickets, but sales have dropped from 2,575 in 1975 to 2,000 in 1977. Auxiliary sales account

for more than 60 percent of the theater's revenue.

Meeker warned that the theater wasn't the only endangered species.

"The bus system and women's softball, both underwritten by DEVCO, are also on the endangered species list that are going to require community support."

Dr. John Aiello, the theater lessee said last week that the development company had been renting out the theater building at a reduced rate and now wanted a more commercial tenant. The theater has been scheduled to close upon expiration of its lease with the Webb company June 1.

Aiello could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Meeker said Webb had received many petitions and letters bemoaning DEVCO's closing of Alco.

"For the record, DEVCO is not closing Alco. The lessee, Dr. Aiello, up until now has given us every indication that he could no longer endure the losses," Meeker said.

Meeker claimed Webb was currently renting at a breakeven figure of \$3.86 a square foot per year. He also noted that Webb received no rent from Aiello from October 1976 through May 1977.

He said the majority of residents have simply given up on movies and watch television. The minority here who attend movies go to see only those that are not featuring sex, pornography, or violence, he said.

"We felt it could no longer succeed as a commercial operation," Meeker said, but added that DEVCO would keep it open if TMA would make its commitment.

Association treasurer Nat Jampel said the association would not make a decision on the matter until its March 13 meeting.

Jampel said he doubted that the current rent of about \$2,000 a month, was really a break-even figure.

"I don't care if only 100 people go to that theater. The point is that this something promised to us by the late Mr. (Del) Webb as part of the recreational complex," Jampel said. The present Webb administration, he claimed, has "no head, no heart, no consciences. They're only out for a buck," he said.

# Alco closes

## Local theater dims the lights permanently

By JACQUE PAPPAS  
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — The community's only movie theater will close its doors for the first time tonight after featuring stars for 14 years on the silver screen.

But it may not be curtains for the Alco Theatre if the property's landlord can find a new tenant to take over the establishment and show movies catering to retirees in the Sun City area.

Sources told the News-Sun Wednesday that United Artists Entertainment chose not to renew its lease at the 437-seat theater because of a notable drop in the number of moviegoers.

"We had shows where no one would show up. That's not common for a movie theater," said a worker at the theater who requested anonymity. "Apparently the company did not think they were getting



Daily News-Sun photo by Stephen Chernelk

**LAST PICTURE SHOW** — The Alco Theater in LaRonde Centre West is closing after today's 7:30 p.m. show. Dwindling attendance has plagued Sun City's only theater.

enough business and making enough money."

Jerry Ruhl, a company spokesman, said United Artists decided to drop the lease because "the theater did not fit with our overall plans."

Ruhl said the fact that the Alco was located in a retirement community and reports that attendance at the movies was

down was not a factor in the company's decision.

"We are trying to have a concentration of multi-plex and multi-screen theaters," Ruhl said.

The Alco is a single-screen theater.

Movies such as "Driving Miss Daisy" and "Cocoon" were big hits at the theater — the latter

playing several times a day for more than six months.

But many movies, such as "Short Circuit" and "Q & A," which is now playing, slumped at the Alco. There were 20 people at the 2:30 p.m. Wednesday showing of "Q & A."

Randal Miller of CBS Property Services, which manages See Alco, A4

OVER

# Alco closes its doors

—From A1

the community's major shopping centers, said the company will soon decide whether the Alco will re-open or if the property will be converted into retail shops.

"From the standpoint of the shopping centers, we do not have anything to announce right now, but we are active in getting someone to take it over. It will definitely be a loss if we have to convert it," Miller said.

The Alco is the closest movie theater to the Sun Cities. Movie times at the Alco are noon, 2:30, 5 p.m. and 7:30, which will be the last showing tonight. Tickets are \$2.50.

Tonight's final movie is a police suspense thriller that stars Nick Nolte and Timothy Hutton.

But some say the feature is exactly why the Alco has been suffering low attendance in recent years.

"The movie has lots of profanity," one person said. "We've had a few people walk out and leave."

Miller said the key to a successful theater most likely depends on an owner "who will make this Sun City's theater."

"A chain operation by its nature does not cater to the needs of a particular city like ours," he said.

The theater, in the La Ronde Shopping Centre at Del Webb Boulevard and Talisman Road, opened in 1976 and has seen five different owners.

Pascal "Pat" Agosta, who owned the theater from 1982 to 1986, said he saw attendance at the Alco drop by 30 percent during his years in Sun City.

"The overscreening in the Glendale and Phoenix area has paid its toll on the Alco. It needs a personal touch . . . and not necessarily what a big company is dictating," Agosta said. "I think the Alco is an institution in Sun City. It can work if the people feel it's their theater."

# Alco marquee is now blank

By JACQUE PAPPAS  
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — Bill and Betty Williams have watched Oscar winners and box office flops at the Alco Theater for 10 years.

Thursday evening, the Sun City West couple sat in the 437-seat motion-picture house perhaps for the last time.

The Alco closed its doors Thursday after the final 7:30 p.m. showing of a movie that brought less than 40 viewers all day.

"We came for the closing. We like to come here — otherwise we would have to go a long way to see a movie," said Betty Williams, her voice almost echoing in the empty theater.

"We heard that they may make this into a dress shop or something and I think that would be an awful shame."

Employees at the theater told the Daily News-Sun Wednesday that United Artists Entertainment chose not to renew its

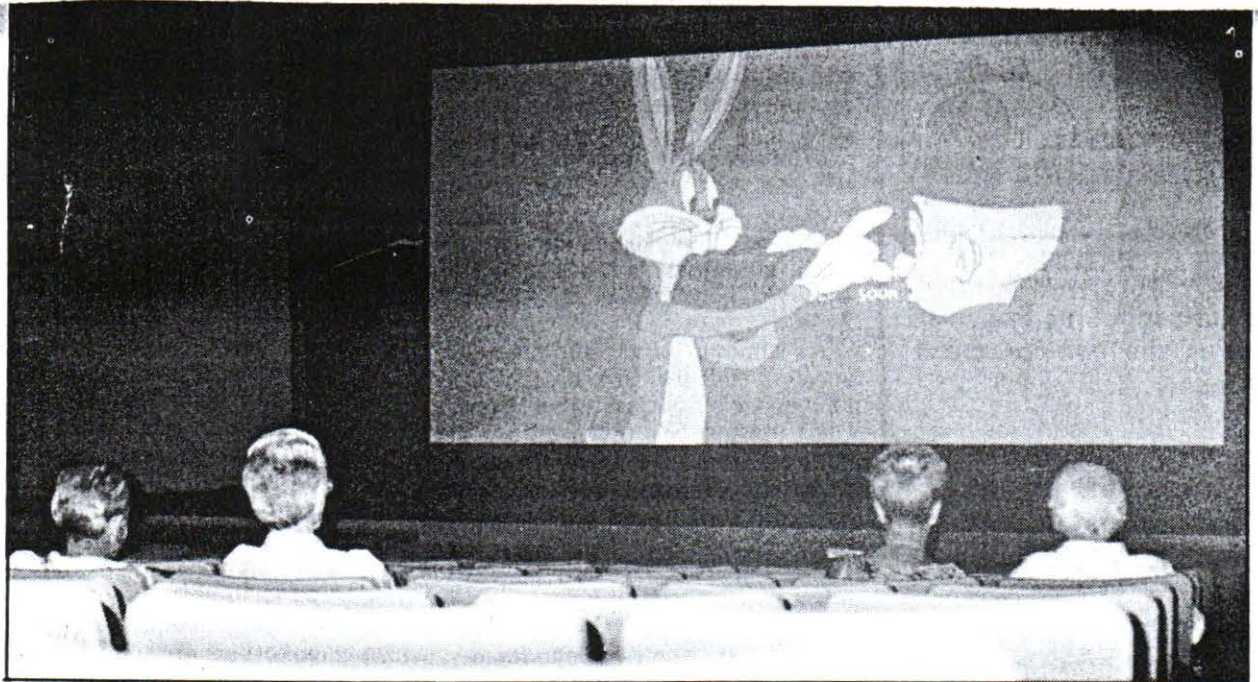
lease because of a notable drop in the number of movie-goers.

"When the movies were \$1 and the volunteers from Boswell helped out, they really got the crowds. In the long run they would make more money with cheaper movie prices," she said, as two more people walked into the 5 p.m. showing, bringing the grand viewer total to four. "I think it's sad that it has not been supported well by the Sun City people."

As the community's only movie theater, the Alco has seen five different owners and a number of strategies to boost attendance since it opened in late 1974.

At one time, volunteers from Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital sold tickets at the theater, in the La Ronde Shopping Centre at Del Webb Boulevard and Talisman Road.

Sun Citians Henry and Roberta Wehrfritz used to attend See Lights, A4



Daily News-Sun

**LAST SHOW** — Four residents watch the cartoon preview before the 5 p.m. movie showing at the Alco Theater Thursday. The theater, suffering from a lack of moviegoers, closed its doors after about 16 years in Sun City.

## Lights are dimmed at Alco

—From A1

Sunday church services at the theater in 1975.

While Faith Presbyterian Church was under construction, Wehrfritz said the congregation meet for several months in the Alco.

"I have more than movie memories at the Alco. It was a place of worship," Wehrfritz said. "We went to the movies quite a bit. It was fairly well patronized and the price was much different then."

Although the theater's landlord has said he would like to find a new tenant to take over the establishment and show movies catering to retirees, some residents were upset that United Artists did not give the community more notice of the

closure.

Shirley, who did not want her last name to be used, was upset that company employees would not give her a refund for \$10 worth of United Artists movie gift certificates she got for Mother's Day.

"They won't give me a refund because they say there are other United Artists theaters. Well, I don't want to go to 43rd Avenue and Bell to see a movie," she said. "I would have never known the theater was closing unless I read it in the paper. I think they should have given us a little bit of advanced notice. I love to go to the shows. I really enjoyed coming here."

The movie "Q & A," an R-rated police thriller, was the single-screen theater's last fea-

ture.

Several of the residents who attended the final showing said they were surprised to hear the Alco was closing.

"It's a nice little theater. I hate to see it go," said Doris Sullivan.

Sun Citizens Bill and Dorothy Williams said they have attended the theater for more than four years.

"It's been very handy, especially for some of the seniors who are not able to travel far from the areas for one reason or another," Dorothy Williams said. "But I'm sure one reason it had to close was because of a lack of business. I don't know how they kept it open with the cost of employees, rent and air conditioning."

# Theater will reopen

By JACQUE PAPPAS  
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — A Phoenix couple whose lives have reeled around the movie business have signed a two-year contract to operate the now-vacant Alco Theater.

Roger and Frances Cherry signed the papers in July and plan to open the theater by Oct. 1.

The Alco, Sun City's only theater, closed its doors July 31 after featuring stars for 14 years on the silver screen.

United Artists Entertainment chose not to renew its lease at the 437-seat theater because of a notable drop in the number of moviegoers.

The vacancy opened an opportunity for the Cherrys.

"This has been my dream for years," said Roger Cherry, who has worked in movie theaters for more than 30 years. "I'm really excited about this and I can't wait to get it open."

Roger Cherry started work as an usher in a movie theater in the 1950s when stars such as Doris Day, Rock Hudson and Elvis Presley got top billing. He eventually worked his way into a management position and since 1978 has managed UA Cinema 6 at Christown.

The movies united the Cherrys, who met while they were both working at a drive-in theater in California.

The Alco, in the La Ronde Shopping Centre at Del Webb Boulevard and Talisman Road, opened in 1976 and has seen five different owners.

Roger Cherry said he hopes to make changes at the theater to bring in big crowds.

"But if the community does not support the theater they will end up not having one. The support of a single-screen theater must be there or it will not



Daily News-Sun

**MOVIE BUSINESS** — Roger and Frances Cherry have signed a two-year lease to operate the Alco Theater, which closed in July. The Cherrys plan to reopen Sun City's only theater by October 1.

survive," Cherry said. "I don't mean that as a threat. It's just a fact."

Although the Alco was formerly run by UA Cinemas and the Cherrys also worked for UA, the new theater will be independently run, Cherry said.

"There needs to be some special attention here and we have to cater to the Sun Cities residents' needs," he said. "Working as an independent, you can make more changes to accommodate a specific community."

Cherry said ticket prices will depend on whether he uses "first-run" or "second-run" movies. First-run movies cost more because they include the new releases while second-run movies are more dated.

Frances Cherry will manage

the day-to-day operations at the theater.

She said the Alco will be repainted and painted before the reopening.

Randy Miller of CBS Properties Services, which manages the community's major shopping centers, said the landlord wanted to maintain the Alco as a theater if possible.

He said several last-resort alternatives were considered to convert the theater into retail shops.

"We think a theater can benefit the community and the shopping centers and we want to give it a chance. We had a number of phone calls from people lamenting the fact that the theater had closed," Miller said.

■ DAILY NEWS-SUN EDITORIAL

## A landmark no more

The Alco theater was a landmark for 14 years in Sun City — its only movie house and once very popular. Now it's gone.

Movies have changed, but the Sun City audience hasn't; they're retired and remember another day when films were less violent and less vulgar in the language used — and dealt with real life, but with innuendo rather than specificity in regard to love and sex. Lately, few of today's movies have filled the bill for Sun Citians, and as a consequence, attendance at the Alco has dropped so far down that United Artists decided to drop the lease.

No blame to United Artists; the company is not in business to underwrite a 437-seat theater where some nights no one showed up. Obviously, in addition to Sun Citians' preferences, there were other attractions such as regular and cable television, and other local entertainment as well.

So Sun Citians probably will not lament the loss of the Alco as they did the loss of the Sun City Stadium a few years back. They can still see movies on television and good old-time cinema at recreation centers programs.

But there's still the question of what will happen to the Alco theater space. Rumor already has it that the theater will be converted into a dress shop. Somehow, that seem's a shame, when you have a stage and a 437-seat auditorium just sitting there.

For a long time now, the Sun City Players little theater group has longed for a home. They've been staging their plays at Mountain View Auditorium, but that has a flat floor, folding chairs and is rather large for intimate theater. In addition, there are musicians and singers, individual and groups performing in church halls and wherever they can who might relish the idea of presenting their talent in a real theater. And, of course, there are political meetings, forums, lectures and others who might appreciate having a central and well-known hall to use.

Maybe somewhere in Sun City are people — entrepreneurs — who can envision such an all-purpose hall being of benefit to the community through a variety of presentations rather than just movies — although an occasional movie wouldn't be amiss, either. Wouldn't it be interesting if they formed a corporation to rescue the Alco with private funds and public subscriptions, and turn it into Sun City's special presentation hall?