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INDEPENDENCE: COMING SOON ... A NEW THEATER NEAR YOU

Construction under way on \$4 million, eight-screen facility

Moviemakers and distributors may be singing the blues about declining film box-office receipts, but that hasn't deterred a company from bringing a movie theater to Independence. Prestige Development of Vancouver, Wash., is building an eight-screen theater, the Independence Cinema, in the Polk County town.

Construction on the \$4 million, 830-seat theater started earlier this month, with completion expected for an Oct. 14 opening. "They've already got the movies scheduled," City Manager Greg Ellis said.

Auditoriums will seat 45 to 170 people each and be fitted for alternative uses such as playing video games or music videos. Prestige also operates eight-plexes in Sandy, population 6,800, and Battle Ground, Wash., population 14,900. Although concession prices will be 10 percent to 20 percent less than Regal's prices, admission will reflect the local market, Ferguson said.

The other differences: More use by the community, such as meetings and rentals, fewer movie trailers, no "The Twenty" commercials running 20 minutes between movies and more personal service. Don't be surprised if people thank you for coming or help you carry your popcorn to your seat, Ferguson said. "We put more disabled (seating) spaces than required," she said. "We don't cut corners where are customers are concerned."

The 18,000-square-foot theater, which will feature Dolby Digital Surround sound, will employ 15 to 30 people. Ferguson said it will be possible to do matinees because the theater is designed to be run by one person if necessary, in part because of its automatic projection system. The decision by Prestige to build in Independence, which has a school-population base of about 20,000, is good news for Ellis, who said he has been trying for four years to get a movie theater. He credited Elie Kassab, Prestige's president, for the decision. "He has small-town theaters in other communities and knows it's doable," Ellis said.

The Sandy theater sold 200,000 tickets last year with a similar population base. In Battle Ground, Prestige lets church groups use the theater auditoriums for free, donates passes for good causes and lets student groups use its auditoriums at no charge, Ellis said. Prestige expects the Independence Cinema to draw from not just Monmouth-Independence but also Dallas, Falls City, West Salem and South Salem, a base of about 45,000 people.

The city has signed a development agreement with Prestige and spent \$550,000 to purchase four homes to make room for the theater. The city will lease the 1.67 acres at 440 S Second St., near the new Independence Public Library, for the cinema. In addition, the city spent \$43,000 to dismantle the old hops warehouse on Second Street, which is being replaced with a 135-car city parking lot to serve the theater and downtown. Pacific Fir

Lumber of Sheridan dismantled the 75-year-old building, with the city keeping 1,000 board feet of beams and planks.

The parking lot should be done by August or September, Ellis said. The cinema could be part of the downtown resurgence, helping restaurants and other businesses. "I think it's going to be a positive for certain kind of industry," Ellis said. "Also, it continues the investment in downtown Independence."

The news of Prestige's move into Independence prompted Canby city officials to contact Ellis because they want a similar movie theater.

Local investment in recent years in Independence has included \$2 million in the new Riverview Park amphitheater, \$1.3 million in the new city library, \$1.3 million in downtown street-and-sidewalk improvements and \$12 million in the new three-story Independence Station mixed-use building.