

Published November 25th, 2009

A Dark Cloud over the Rheem Theater

By Sophie Braccini



Graphic Amanda Griggs

Peterson and Sheehan have 3-6 weeks' worth of films purchased and

say they will try to work with the property owner if results improve dramatically within the next weeks.

"We are operating week to week," said Peterson. Many Moraga residents are rallying to support the theater. "The Rheem Theatre supports many fundraisers for our schools," says Kathy Ranstrom, who has been involved with Moraga schools for years, "aside from their support, the Theatre is a great community asset. As we've guided our kids down the road to independence, the Rheem Theater has been a great place to let them start practicing going out with friends without parent escorts." Ranstrom urged her fellow residents to spread the word: Go to the movies during the week if you want to help save the Rheem Theater.

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Tom Peterson and Jim Sheehan will wait to see how the current movies New Moon and The Blind Side do at Moraga's Rheem Theatre in the next couple of weeks before making their final decision, but the figures are not good; if the theater continues to lose money Peterson and Sheehan, who bought the theater over a year ago, will leave.

"We cannot continue to put good money after bad," says co-owner Peterson, "we've invested in that theater, cleaned it up, brought good movies, but we have been very disappointed by the results." Sheehan says that the theater is completely empty during the week and that weekend sales are not enough to compensate. He reports that the sales at Rheem are down 40% from last year. "Movies are a recession-resistant business," he adds, "but not recession-proof." Peterson and Sheehan recently bought the Orinda Theater as well. There the results are better and figures have stayed the same over the past year. Additional negative elements have affected Moraga. "The shopping center where we are operating has so many empty spaces," says Sheehan, "at night it's a desert." The lights surrounding the theater have been out of order for months. "When we ask the Town, they say it is PG&E's responsibility," says Peterson, "and when we ask PGE, they say it is the Town's responsibility."