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First Classic Film Hall of Fame Scheduled to Open in Moraga

By Sophie Braccini



Hall of Fame illustration Provided

Derek Zemrak wants Moraga to become a prominent place for movie lovers. The founder and president of the California Independent Film Festival Association (CAIFFA), which operates the historical New Rheem and Orinda theaters, Zemrak and his cinephile partners are establishing the first Classic Film Hall of Fame at the Rheem Theatre.

The Hall of Fame will open May 3 to honor those who made films during Hollywood's golden years, underscoring the love of the movie theater's founder, Hollywood aficionado Donald Rheem.

"It is not a well known fact that Donald Rheem was friends with William Randolph Hearst, and that they both loved entertaining Hollywood celebrities," said Zemrak as he released the news of the hall April 9. Rheem was one of the largest shareholders in Paramount Studios during its infancy. At one gala Hollywood opening at Hearst Castle, Rheem went to see the in-home theater that Hearst built. It is said that Rheem told Hearst, "Very impressive, but wait until you see what I'm going to build."

Rheem went on to build both the Orinda and Rheem theaters in 1941 and 1957. The Moraga theater was the first

of its kind to be built in a shopping center; it was originally a one-screen theater, and from the beginning was seen as a feature to build a community around. "Donald Rheem was a visionary," said Zemrak, "and we are going to continue this vision of celebrities and nostalgia."

While there are classic film archives in the United States, there is currently no hall of fame for any actor, producer, director, or musician - nothing to honor the men and women who created the films. Why Moraga? "Because of Donald Rheem's vision and love of movies," said Zemrak, "and because of the great Hollywood history we want to preserve."

The Hall of Fame will start on the ground floor of the theater. A "Walk of Fame" will be created with stars along the downstairs and upstairs hallway floors and pictures of hall of fame inductees displayed on the walls.

"Next to each inductee's picture there will be an interactive device, like an iPad, that will display a video presentation of the star's life," said Zemrak. Additionally, the fourth upstairs theater will be used as a museum to display memorabilia - some from Zemrak's personal collection and some from the inductees or their descendents.

The Classic Film Hall of Fame will add new honorees semi-annually during the Classic Film weekends - the first Classic Film Festival is scheduled May 10-12 and will be held at both the Rheem and Orinda theaters. (See related column on page B6.)

The current list of celebrities scheduled to attend the opening include Mickey Rooney, who will answer questions after the screening of "National Velvet," and Cloris Leachman, winner of eight Emmy awards, who will give a presentation after the showing of "Young Frankenstein." The daughters of Lou Costello and Boris Karloff will also attend.

The Rheem Theatre recently installed two digital projectors and was outfitted for hearing impaired viewers. The plans for an elevator have been submitted to the Moraga Planning Department. The CAIFFA is still in negotiations with the theater's owner to get a long-term lease for the property.



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[back](#)

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