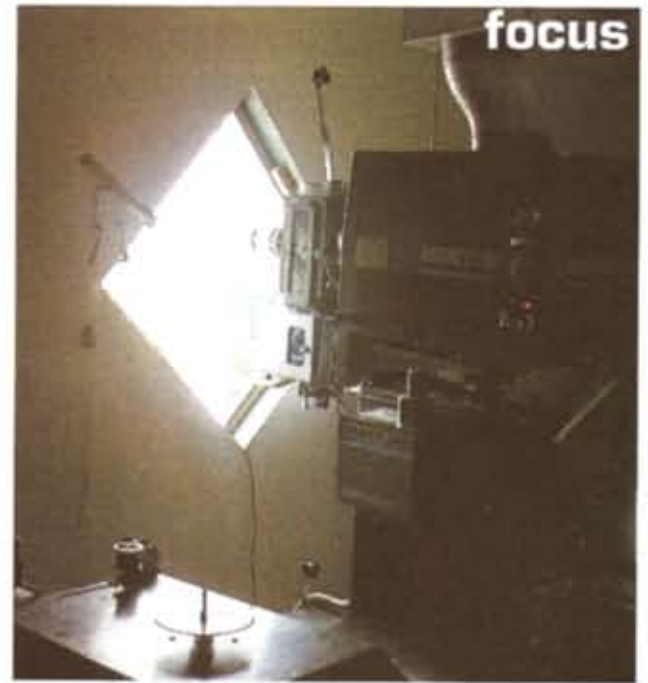




TECHNICOLOR NOSTALGIA



by Celia Powell

The first drive-in opened on Tuesday June 6, 1933 at a location on Crescent Boulevard, Camden, New Jersey. It's owner and inventor, Richard Hollingshead charged 25 cents for the car and 25 cents per person.

Three speakers mounted next to the screen emanated sound for the entire theater. Cars near the back of the drive-in could not hear the movie while people neighboring the theater must have complained about all that noise.

This started the drive-in boom and by 1942, there were ninety-five theaters in the United States. There was a lull in drive-in theater production and operations when gasoline was rationed and the United States became involved with World War II.

The post war years brought on the addition of swing sets to the front of the drive-in during the baby boom. In the end of the 1950s, there were about 5000 drive-ins across the country.

People began to lose interest in drive-ins in the 1960s and 1970s and by the late 1980s there are few theaters left. Today, people are beginning to rediscover the excitement of the drive-in.

Poodle skirts, muscle cars and the big screen.
Drive-in theaters are coming back home to the *Boomers*

Tim Vande Wattering first became interested in the drive-in concept in 2001. It took two years of planning to get the Field of Scenes on Highway 55 in Freedom ready for opening in 2003.

"We opened on the Fourth of July," Vande Wattering said. "Business was good and we were full. A lot of people supported us."

Two shows play each night on the drive-in screen and the first of which were Finding Nemo and Bruce Almighty. Tim got involved with the huge undertaking involved with opening a drive-in because he already owned the property where the Field of Scenes is located.

"I owned another business," Vande Wattering said. "I don't think I would have if I didn't own the property. I wanted to open another business that didn't take a whole lot of employees."

The Field of Scenes is family-owned and operated. Tim's wife and partner, Brenda, and their two children all work at the Field of Scenes during the summer. Brenda's mother and father did a lot of the preparation and still help with the drive-in.

"They ran the ticket booth and Bob did some grilling," Vande Wattering said. "Right now he's cleaning out there even though he's now retired. It's totally family oriented."

In Tim Vande Wattering's teen-age years, he hung out at The Tower in Little Chute. That was one of the reasons why he wanted to bring a drive-in back to this area.

"I have a lot of good memories," Vande Wattering said. "A lot of good things happened there. Not that I want to mention any in an article or anything. It was fun."

Business is going fairly well at the drive-in and the word is starting to get out about its existence. The Field of Scenes website, www.fieldofscenes.biz, which was designed by a family friend, is getting hit quite a bit.

The Field of Scenes Drive-in is centrally located between Appleton and Green Bay. It's phone number, 920-788-1935, along with the website are the only ways to check movie listings because the Vande Watterings' advertising dollars are minimal.

"A drive-in isn't that lucrative," Vande Wattering said. "It's okay. If our family had to live off of it we would have to change our lifestyle a little bit."

The Vande Watterings built the complex by themselves with the help of a friend and someone hired to do the cement walls. They purchased the movie screen new from Selby Products in Ohio, a professional screen company.

"In the meantime, the Highway 29 drive-in was being torn down so we were able to purchase both projectors," Vande Wattering said. "They actually had two screens up there. Now I sit with one projector and I still have two extra



During the drive-in boom of the 1940s, there were ninety-five theaters in the United States. By the end of the 1950s, there were about 5000 drive-ins across the country.



CRUISIN' INTO SUMMER

Whether heading out to the drive-in to catch the latest box office hit, just showing off the new polish job on the main drag, or wanting to show the kids or grand kids just what your old '56 Bel-Air looked like, Wisconsin's Summer has lots to offer every auto enthusiast, from the classic car gearhead, to the high school hooligans.

Check out the one's nearest you, or take a day trip to see some great cars on display.

WI CAR SHOWS

■ Saturday, June 10

3rd Annual Average Joe Car Show at Eventswood Village Shops in Wausau 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (920) 867-4300. Fax: (920) 867-4300. Website: none. Email: bob@execpc.com. Free event, free admission, free registration, free food for anyone with a show car, beat fry, DJ, beer tent, dozens of trophies, 100's of cars, loud pipes contestant flame throwing contest.

Deerfield Rod & Gun Club Car Show at Deerfield Rod & Gun Club City in Deerfield. (608) 347-4898. Website: www.deerfieldrodandgunclub.com. Email: hobbyhorse81@hotmail.com. Show starts at 9 a.m., awards at 3 p.m., minimum 3 best of class trophies as well as specialty awards. Food and Beverage on site, indoor bathrooms. This is a judged show, all years welcome. See website for show flyer.

Kettlemoraine Classic Kar Klub and Auto Craft Collision Center presents their annual Classic Car Show from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Show will be held at Auto Craft - 2 miles north of West Bend on Hwy. 45 to Friendly Dr. (262) 625-4534 Rich Thieme or (262) 338-0332 Gary Wise.

Rhineland Car Show and Road Tour, Courthouse SP: Headwaters Corvette Club, Dennis McGill. (715) 369-1226.

■ Sunday, June 11

14th Annual Don Miller Dodge Mopar Car Show, 5802 Odessa Rd. SP: Don Miller Dodge, David Pegelow, 4222 School Rd., Madison. (608) 242-4087.

Wausau Auto Fest, VFW, River Dr., Russ Schoeneman, Jr., 1202 N. 57th, Wausau 54402. (715) 842-0287.

Wisconsin Farm Technology Days July 11, 12 & 13—Sheboygan County Show at Hesslink's Quonset Farms near Oostburg (920) 478-3852 or www.wifarmtechnologydays.com.

20th Annual Car Show, Swap Meet & Flea Market at the Washburn County Fairgrounds in Spooner. SP: Badger Wheels Chapter-30C, Fred Koehler, N5328 170th St., Elmwood 54740. (715) 839-5114.

■ Saturday, June 17

Lake Martha Days Car Show, 7th St. SP: Country Cruisers Car Club, Joe Thurow, P.O. Box 291, Osseo 54758. (715) 567-3336.

6th Annual Muscle Maniac's Car Show, Mardigrass Club Grounds. SP: Muscle Maniac's Car Club, Tom



screens. My goal would be to put up a screen two here."

The drive-in projector works like one in an indoor theater. The Vande Weterings run movies off a table. Depending on the length of the film, usually both movies are placed on one platter.

"We have a film trailer ahead of the whole show which features National Anthem, previews, and an intermission clock that we install telling you five minutes to show time," Vande Wetering said. "Then dancing hot dogs and what not. After five minutes it will go back into some previews again and then it will start the second movie. Sometimes we have to switch lenses on the camera and an aperture plate depending on if one is filmed in scope or if it's filmed flat.

Vande Wetering learned how to operate a projector by operating a projector. He went up to Shawano's Moonlight Outdoor Drive-in one night and watched them build film, which means putting film together and taking it back apart, to learn the trade.

"I was by no means qualified to be a projectionist without grabbing onto it and learning it," Vande Wetering said. I had to learn how to thread the film, what lenses to use and how the projector moves up and down or right to left. I learned what to do to get the film to fit the best on the screen."

Tim works at the Field of Scenes full-time in the summers doing maintenance and cutting grass. The theater runs a very neat ship.

"When I went to another theater when it was open, I could see why it didn't succeed," Vande Wetering said. "Somebody didn't care. They didn't put their all into it. I guess from the drive-ins I've seen, I want to be the best. That is my true goal."

There are other fine drive-ins in Wisconsin that each offer something unique to the viewer such as the Gemini Drive-in in Eau Claire, the Highway 18 Outdoor Theater in Jefferson, the Keno Family Drive-in in Kenosha, The Big Sky Drive-in in Wisconsin Dells, the Skyway Drive-in Theater in Fish Creek and the Moonlight Outdoor in Shawano.

"I went to the one in Fish Creek," Vande Wetering said. "That was there forever. The Shawano Moonlight shoots out of the back of the theater. It's a very nice place. I don't want you getting all these other drive-ins mad at me for this article

or anything." The Field of Scenes has had people visit from California, Chicago, Illinois and Michigan. Every now and then somebody pops in from somewhere far away. "They come from a distance so they plan on staying at a hotel so they don't have to drive home," Vande Wetering said. "They kind of make a weekend out of it."

The theater is geared for family viewing. They typically run a movie that is rated G or PG for the first feature and then a PG13 for the second movie. The theater has swings, horse drawn hayrides, volleyball and basketball courts set up. Many viewers bring blankets and lawn chairs to watch the movies outside their cars.

"I was going to try running an R rated movie last fall but then we had the wind storm come through and it blew our screen apart," Vande Wetering said. "We sustained quite a lot of damage that we had to deal with. It took about three weeks to fix. Last year the weather in October just so happened to be very nice and we could have run a movie on Halloween. If I could do a Halloween show and then pull the plug, that would be my true goal."

Season depends on the weather in the drive-in theater business. In Wisconsin, that is a lot to ask since we experience unseasonably warm periods in both spring and fall. "This spring, I should have opened the second week in April because it was nice," Vande Wetering said. You get into the third and fourth week and we had rain and bad weather. We planned to open on the 28th. It's always weather permitting anyway. If you get a lightning storm or something out of the norm you surely don't want to run a show. We try to cancel ahead of time for a weather warning."

May 26, 2006 was one of those nights where the weather was unpredictable. It was a warm spring evening and, though it was cloudy, the weather was not at all threatening. Then just as the first movie was coming to a conclusion, lightning flashed and it started to pour sending outdoor viewers scurrying to the security of their cars or the snack stand.

"A storm might look like it's coming and then it goes around you and the next one will come right through you," Vande Wetering said. "We played in torrential rain here where one of my staff and myself held up an umbrella above the projection window and kept squeegeeing it off every now and then because of the water."

Once the second movie is started there is no canceling due to weather. The theater will cancel the first show due to weather. "We had fog actually run in here," Vande Wetering said. "That was during our second year we were open. You couldn't see the picture. The fog was so thick. We gave everybody a rain check and told everybody to hold his or her tickets. Twenty minutes later the fog lifted and you could see the show. So I learned to take 10 min-

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WI CAR SHOWS

Kolakowski, P.O. Box 142, Lakewood 54138. (715) 276-7032.

Gustmans Annual Auto Show, 3415 Gallagher Rd., Marinette. SP: Gustman Automotive Group, Ray Lopez, 3415 Gallagher Rd., Marinette 54143. (715) 735-7483.

100 Year Anniversary Kiesel Motor Car Co., 147 N. Rural St., Hartford. SP: Automotive Museum, Dale Anderson (262) 673-7999.

Annual Company Picnic—Marchant Schmidt, Inc., MSI Plant #2, Fond du Lac. (920) 921-4760 or www.marchantschmidt.com.

Memories (Bird) Car Club Annual Car Show at the Hospitality Inn, 4400 S. 27th Street in Milwaukee. (414) 281-0631.

■ Sunday, June 18

Swan City Car Show in Beaver Dam.

British Car Field Day in Village Park, Main St., Sussex. SP: British Car Field Day, John Stockinger, W266 S3399 Hazelwood PL., Waukesha 53189. (262) 521-1072.

5th Annual Antique and Classic Car & Truck Show 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Bird Creek Park, 16th & Hwy. 21 in Wautoma. (920) 293-4305.

4th Annual Cruise-In Charity Car Show at 1724 Merrill Ave., Wausau. SP: Cody's Cruise-In, Jon Cody, 1724 Merrill Ave., Wausau 54401. (715) 675-2940.

4th Annual Father's Day Car Show at Tallman House Grounds, 440 N. Jackson St., Janesville. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. SP: Rock County Historical Society. (608) 756-4509.

Wheels of Distinction Car Club Show (Father's Day) on Hwy. 2, next to the C-Store in Iron River. Hartan Phillips, 63920 Bradford Rd., Iron River, WI 54847 or (715) 372-4155.

■ Wednesday, June 21

The Classic Car Drive-In returns for a 2nd year. Main Street Mayville will be lined with vintage cars from 5 to 8 p.m. for your viewing pleasure. Sponsored by Main Street Mayville.

■ Saturday, June 24

3rd Annual Easton-White Creek Lions Club Car Show, located in Adams—County Road H, West of Hwy 13 between Adams and Wisconsin Dells. (608) 339-2986 <http://www.geocities.com/eastonwhite-creekions/> rodsrwm@maqs.net. Trophies for Best Show with classes of '20-'30, '40, '50, '60, '70, and Best Street Rod. All cars wishing to be judged by local enthusiasts will have a \$5.00 fee; all others that wish to just show are free. Admission is free and parking is free. Vendors are welcome and we just ask that no food or beverage vendors come as we have food and beverages on the grounds. Our website has all the info in it if you would like to visit it at <http://www.geocities.com/eastonwhitecreekions/> or contact Rodney Babcock at rodsrwm@maqs.net on prices for vendors and Swap Meet Spaces.

6th Annual Cool City Classic Car Show located in downtown Two Rivers. (920) 794-1482. Fax: (920) 553-4586. Website: www.trmainstreet.org Email: mainstreet@takefield.net. Show vehicles will find ample display space throughout the newly remodeled downtown, with vendors, food, and entertainment all day long. Show cars have a \$5.00 entry fee and all car spectators are free!! This is a "MUST-ATTEND" for any car enthusiast!

Older Elison Bay Days Festival at the Liberty Grove Historical Society Property in Ellison Bay (Door County), June 24 & 25. Saturday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Classic & Antique Auto Show. SP: Ellison Bay Men's Club (Russ) (920) 854-9471.

Artful Car Show, 7271 Hwy. X, Three Lakes. SP: Center For The Arts, Marie Moore, 947 Olson Rd., Three Lakes 54562. (715) 546-3702.

More car shows on page 52

Cont'd on page 67

Technicolor Nostalgia

Cont'd from page 25

The true test of the drive-in experience will be in the middle of the summer when the weather gets nicer and the Field of Scenes will be busy.

utes, 15 minutes, see what the weather actually does."

In case of inclement weather, rain tickets are used to get into the drive-in another night. Theater patrons can actually keep their tickets but must use them the year of the rain out. Field of Scenes tracks each ticket by number.

"Every now and then you get someone sneaking in," Vande Wattering said. "That's part of the experience. I don't know that I caught anyone coming out of a trunk. I know I went into a

drive-in in a trunk already."

When the drive-in shows two PG13s a different set of patronizes the theater. The Field of Scenes has a way of handling date-type funny business.

"We are able to address everything right away," Vande Wattering said. "You get one warning and then you are out of here. We've had people complaining that kids are playing up on the swings and stuff during the movie. Merely, the security man goes up there and the kids come off. I don't really say that a lot because if people don't mind what do I care. That's what it's there for; their memory of a dream."

The drive-in orders its movies directly from the movie

companies. Tim book the movies ahead of time and has to pay a percentage of our ticket sales based on how good the movie is and how in demand it is.

"We normally run a month and a half off depending on if the movie is hot or not," Vande Wattering said. "I look at it like, we're a drive-in. If that movie is two months old, people still come here because of the nostalgia and because there is a good movie to be seen."

Movie viewers should come early and come hungry. The snack shop has a full kitchen downstairs and serves pizzas, hamburgers and chicken strips among others. You can even order a pizza from your car using a cell phone.

The sound system is different from the speaker boxes that used to be hung in the car window. Field of scenes broadcasts sound out of 98.9 FM through an FM transmitter.

"It's a glorified CB because it stays very close to the boundaries," Vande Wattering said. "When you get out to Highway 55 you start losing it. I lose it up by my shop. On the third night you'll pick it up again. It's very low frequency signal."

The Vande Wattering kids think the theater business is great when it opens each season but it gets long because the whole summer is wrapped up at the drive-in when they are off of school. They get Monday and Tuesday off but Wednesday through Saturday they will be working.

"My daughter goes to volley ball camp," Vande Wattering said. "That stuff they don't miss. The one-on-one time because we're all working together all the time is good, but they lose a lot of their childhood. I don't think they don't look at it as work. We set my daughter up by the front up by concessions. She was excited about that."

The true test of the drive-in experience will be in the middle of the summer when the weather gets nicer and the Field of Scenes will be busy.

"I recommend people come early," Vande Wattering said. "The first three hundred cars in line are coming in. That's enough. Come on out and see us. Check us out." ☺



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