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Local cinemas pin their spring hopes on successful vaccine

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Two local cinemas and the drive-in have all had rough journeys this year due to COVID-19, and yet all hope that next spring will be better with a viable vaccine.

Lindsay's Century Theatre reopened on

Aug. 14. The Lindsay Drive-In reopened earlier, on May 31, where they even tried some live concerts as opposed to just movie offerings. The Highlands Cinema in Kinmount has remained closed since Thanksgiving of 2019.

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sanitation plan given the pandemic realities. “We go in just before the movie starts, and I check off what seats are occupied,” said Dominic to the *Advocate*, “so we know exactly where to clean after it’s over. We also handle the bathrooms, the door handles, the handrails, the sinks,” she says, wiping down anything that people might touch.

Dominic also said after a crowded day, they clean the whole auditorium with a disinfectant fogger.

The *Highlands Cinema* has been operated by 73-year-old Keith Stata for over four decades. A theatre that started in a house with one projector, it later grew to five theatres with over 50,000 visits a year. But it’s also a museum of cinema and an animal rescue where Stata takes care of 42 abandoned and mistreated cats.

The theatre usually opens on the first weekend of May and closes for the season in Thanksgiving, but the theatre has remained shut down since October 2019. “I’m sure everybody thinks I’ve just sat around doing nothing during this pandemic,” Stata told the *Advocate*, “but I’ve been so worn out that I’m averaging 17,000 steps a day.”

Stata has kept busy with yard work, repair work, budget stress, taking care of his cats, and more. He said it would cost \$30,000 to be able to reopen, partly because of mandatory outside inspections and a reopening process that takes 120 hours. These fees would normally not be a

Century owner Steve Podolsky and assistant manager Sheila Dominic operate the downtown cinema, which opened in 1951 and will be celebrating its 70th anniversary next year. *Onward*, *My Spy* and *The Invisible Man* were playing, and the managers were planning a spring of exciting flicks when they had to shut down in mid-March.

When they reopened, they created a

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problem, but there is no indication he would be busy enough to be able to pay the bills if he reopened.

The Century is currently getting rent and wage subsidy assistance, and they could have opened earlier than August, said Podolsky, “with stuff that you could see on Netflix and Crave, and we just didn’t find that would be worth our while... We have a wish list of movies we want to show and we have someone who helps us book those films from the studios, but there’s a whole lot less openings now.”

The *Lindsay Drive-In*, which closed their doors on Oct. 29, 2020, for the season, played movies too, but they focused their advertising on live entertainment instead.

Some performers and bands like Garth Brooks and Metallica aired live onscreen, but the drive-in was also able to book bands on their stage, like Three Days Grace, Woodstock Revisited and The Travelling Milburys. One of their concerts, *Home Again*, was set up and planned for four months by local musician Darryl James, bass player of The Strumbellas, and his wife Robyn. Both discussed their passion for the Academy and their involvement with that concert in an [earlier episode](#) of the Advocate Podcast.

Ticket sales for *Home Again* reached \$40,000, and that money went towards Lindsay’s Academy Theatre. James explained the Academy Theatre needs the money because it is an old building that requires maintenance, and cannot currently

reopen because only 50 people maximum could currently watch a show, with further expenditures for protecting performers, guests and volunteers.

Robyn is on the Academy Theatre’s board of directors and Darryl is on the theatre’s programming committee. They wondered what they could do for the Academy Theatre and got inspiration from Canadian singer Brett Kissel, who was doing a drive-in concert series. Robyn came up with the idea of a fundraising initiative through the theatre at the drive-in because attendants would be safer in their cars. They took it to the rest of the board, and they loved it.”

The concert happened on Sept. 30 and Oct. 1. Two of James’ band mates Jeremy Drury and Jon Hembrey joined him, and other performers who showed up included James Barker, Sophia Mackey, Tom Collver, Dwayne Gretsky members Tyler Kyte, Nick Rose, and more. James also expressed his love for theatres because when people go out to shows, they also visit and support local businesses like restaurants.

The Century is currently the only movie theatre in Kawartha Lakes open to the public. At this time they’re open four days a week on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and Tuesdays. Matinees are on Saturdays and Sundays at 2 p.m. and their other shows play in the evenings, all at 7 p.m.

Stata, in Kinmount, has gotten big support from the local community for taking care of his 42 cats.

“I am gratified my customers remembered the cats, and there was a considerable amount donated this year, much more than I ever expected given we were closed.” It is still, however, uncertain if the theatre will be able to open its doors in 2021 or even the year after.

Unless he can bring Hollywood blockbusters to his theatre without restrictions and unless customers feel safe enough to come, then it will be difficult for him to make it happen.

James is proud and grateful for the turnout and sales of the Home Again concert.

We were able to get James Barker and all these artists out because I think they realize how important theatres are to

communities,” he said. Robyn and the board of directors are continuing to pursue further fundraising efforts for the theatre, because he said the new surge of the virus might keep the Academy theatre closed for a while.

All the business owners are hoping for a much better spring. Podolsky said if there is a vaccine released to the public soon, next year could be much better.

However, Stata pointed out that public would only be comfortable if at least 75 per cent of the population was vaccinated — and he is uncertain if that will be possible before May when he is potentially set to reopen.

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