

Economist &amp; Sun • Stouffville Tribune

# BUSINESS

## Big screens, big bucks

*Theatre companies scramble to attract York movie-goers with state-of-the-art facilities*

BY ROY GREEN  
STAFF WRITER

When one looks at what's happening with movie screens across York Region, it's hard not to think in terms of movie images.

As in *Titanic*. As in *Godzilla*. Or maybe *Armageddon*.

By the time the construction dust settles, probably early next year, York Region will have moved from the current 55 cinema screens to 147 screens, many of them giant-sized.

Richmond Hill, with the opening of the 10-screen Silver City this spring, has grown to 28 screens in three theatres.

There is also a 10-screen theatre now under construction on the south side of Hwy. 7 in Markham, just west of Warden Avenue.

But that's a mere drop in the popcorn bucket when one considers there are no fewer than three theatre complexes — with 61 screens — already under construction in Vaughan, including a giant IMAX cinema.

And though the local governments in Newmarket and East Gwillimbury are still

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• Dennis Kucherawy, Famous Players

of film venues?

The question is particularly relevant in Vaughan, where Famous Players, Cineplex Odeon and AMC Theatres are all on target to open their multiplex theatres in time for the Christmas movie rush.

Famous Players (19 screens) and AMC (30 screens) are building right across the road from each other on Hwy. 400, just south of Hwy. 7.

"We're not concerned about too many screens in an area that's growing as fast as Vaughan," says Dennis Kucherawy, vice-president of corporate public relations for Famous Players.

"It was the same in Mississauga, where we opened the 10-screen Coliseum, then a 10-screen Silver City a few months later. If

debating, it appears there will be a new 16-screen theatre complex built on the border of those communities within the next year, adding to the 11 screens in two movie houses currently in Newmarket.

Can one municipality, even one as large as York Region, support this sudden explosion

of film venues?

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STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Famous Players invested \$11 million to build Silver City in Richmond Hill — a development that redefines what it means to go to the movies.

you look at the top-10 grossing theatres in Canada right now, the first is the Coliseum, second is Silver City, Mississauga.

Famous Players' president John Bailey refers to Vaughan, where the company already owned the 400 drive-in, as a "signature location."

The 4,800-seat theatre will be called Colossus and will be the company's biggest, "at least for the time being," says Kucherawy.

But he says it doesn't mean older theatres will close down.

"Sometimes, it means some theatres become discount houses — it increases the types of films available to an audience.

Ken Prue, senior vice-president of marketing for Cineplex Odeon, agrees.

"It probably means converting some existing complexes to art movie houses or discount houses.

Prue says the company hasn't named the new Markham project, but Cineplex has been using the term "cinetropolis" to describe the wave of multi-screen theatres.

"This is the re-screening of Canada," says Prue. "It happened in the food business with

superstores replacing the corner grocery store and it's happening in the hardware business, with giant hardware stores. I guess we're doing the same thing."

And none of these new theatres will stop at being just theatres. All boast state-of-the-art digital sound and giant screens. And there's more.

Famous Players' Colossus, which will be shaped like a giant spaceship, will have the first 3-D IMAX screen in Canada, the first licensed bar and dining area, two rooms for birthday parties and special occasions and an virtual video arcade.

Odeon's theatres, including the new 10-seat complex in Markham, will have wall-to-wall curved screens, digital sound, plush seats and, for the hearing-impaired, listening devices with wireless headsets.

Richmond Hill's Silver City, built at a cost of \$11 million, includes eateries, rooms for parties and a high-tech video arcade.

All of which brings a whole new meaning to that old movie jingle, "Let's All Go To The Lobby."

**TELEVISION:** *Measuring the likes and dislikes of viewers*

## Markham firm at heart of high-stakes ratings game

BY ROY GREEN  
STAFF WRITER

The future of your favorite television program is determined in a series of 30-second signals from computers in homes across Canada — signals received in the wee hours of the morning in a Markham office.

"The people-meters across Canada download between 3 and 6 a.m. every morning," says Michael Leahy of Nielsen Media Research Inc., the company that tracks television viewing habits across the United States and Canada.

"We can deliver audience information — very specific demographics about who is watching what — to broadcasters by noon of the same day," he says.

The Nielsen name is synonymous with television ratings and audience estimates.

Those ratings are a barometer of people's viewing habits and form the basis for advertising buying decisions worth more than \$40 billion each year.

### SAMPLE HOME

In Canada, those people-meters — mini-computers attached to television sets in more than 2,000 homes — measure what program or channel is being tuned and who is watching.

In fact, the data processed includes when the set is turned on, which channel is tuned, when the channel is changed, when the set is off, and who is viewing, and when that person's viewing starts and stops.

In addition, program lineups and station/cable carriage information are confirmed to make certain Nielsen accurately reports what is being watched.

A Nielsen field researcher, who recruits the household, assigns a personal viewing button to each member of the family, linking the assigned button to the age and gender of each.

Additional buttons even allow guests in a sample home to log in by entering their age and gender.

When the TV is on, a red light flashes.

See NIELSON'S, page 16



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