

Moviegoers wait for takeover fallout

BY SIMONE JOSEPH
Staff Writer

When Richmond Hill moviegoer Dr. Huy Nguyen read Cineplex had taken over Famous Players, he was concerned.

"The more takeovers there are, the less choice (of theatres) for the public. It's fine for industry because there's less competition, but I don't think it's good for the individual moviegoer."

Dr. Nguyen, a 43-year-old orthodontist, goes to the movies every other week and is worried the takeover will lead to fewer screens and increased ticket prices.

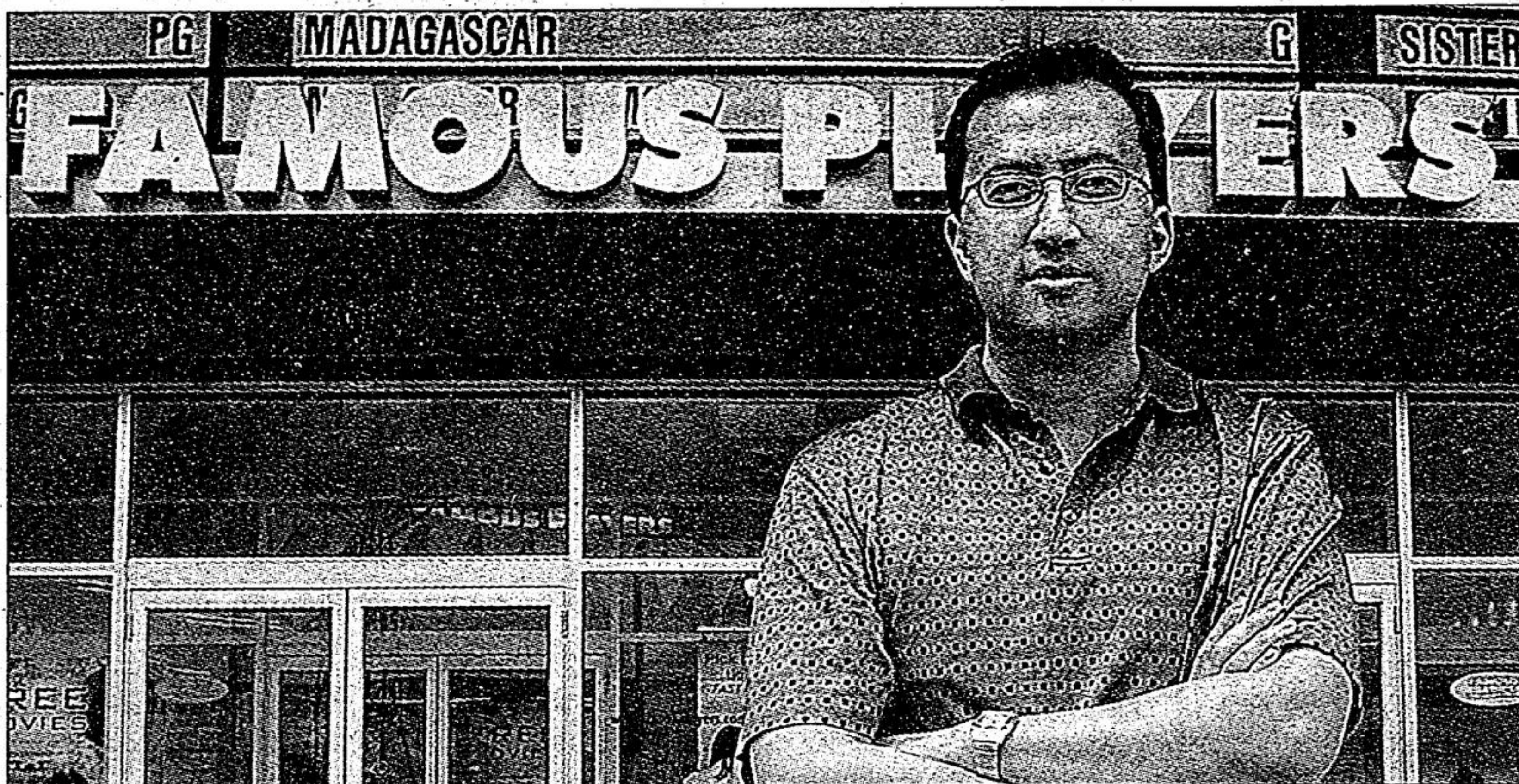
He went to see *Madagascar* with his daughter at the Famous Players in the Hwy. 7 and Yonge Street area Thursday afternoon.

Dr. Nguyen is also worried decreased competition will mean less motivation for theatre companies to introduce innovations such as improved sound quality.

Early this week, news hit that Cineplex Galaxy LP had bought its main rival, Famous Players, in a \$500-million deal.

The competition bureau, which reviewed the deal, issued a consent agreement.

Under the takeover, Cineplex must pull out of 35 theatres to comply with the government regula-



STAFF PHOTO/SIMONE JOSEPH

Dr. Huy Nguyen takes his daughter to the movies once a week. The Richmond Hill resident wonders if the Cineplex's purchase of Famous Players will raise prices and reduce choice.

tions, leaving it with 1,300 screens at 132 locations or 63 per cent of the Canadian market.

While movie lovers such as Mr. Nguyen fear less choice, Cineplex officials believe there will be more films to pick from.

Before the deal, competing the-

atres in the same area would likely have shown the same movies, according to Pat Marshall, vice-president of communications and investor relations for Cineplex Galary LP. Now the company will likely want to avoid this type of duplication, Ms Marshall said.

"It (the takeover) is a great move for moviegoers in York Region. We'll have more screens to show a wider variety of films," she said.

While Cineplex has agreed to pull out of 35 theatres, according to the competition bureau orders, none of the theatres in York Region

will be closed, she said.

As for ticket prices increasing, the company sets prices according to real estate value. Downtown Toronto, for example, is more expensive than Newmarket so ticket prices are higher in the city.

Even if the takeover leads to higher prices, it will have little impact on Linda Price, whose son, Connor, appears in *Cinderella Man*.

"To me, a movie theatre is a movie theatre. We don't want prices to go up but what can you do? We're not going to stay away because of high prices," she said.

The takeover will not affect the independently-run Gem Theatre in Georgina in the short term, said R.J. Gorman, owner of this movie theatre.

But it's the long-term impact of what he sees as a movie theatre monopoly.

"With the present state, Famous Players and Cineplex probably control (the majority) of the screens in Canada ... I don't know if that's a level playing field for independent Canadian theatres."

But there may be a silver lining to the acquisition for small theatres, Mr. Gorman said.

If prices go up, consumers will be drawn to lower prices at independent screens.

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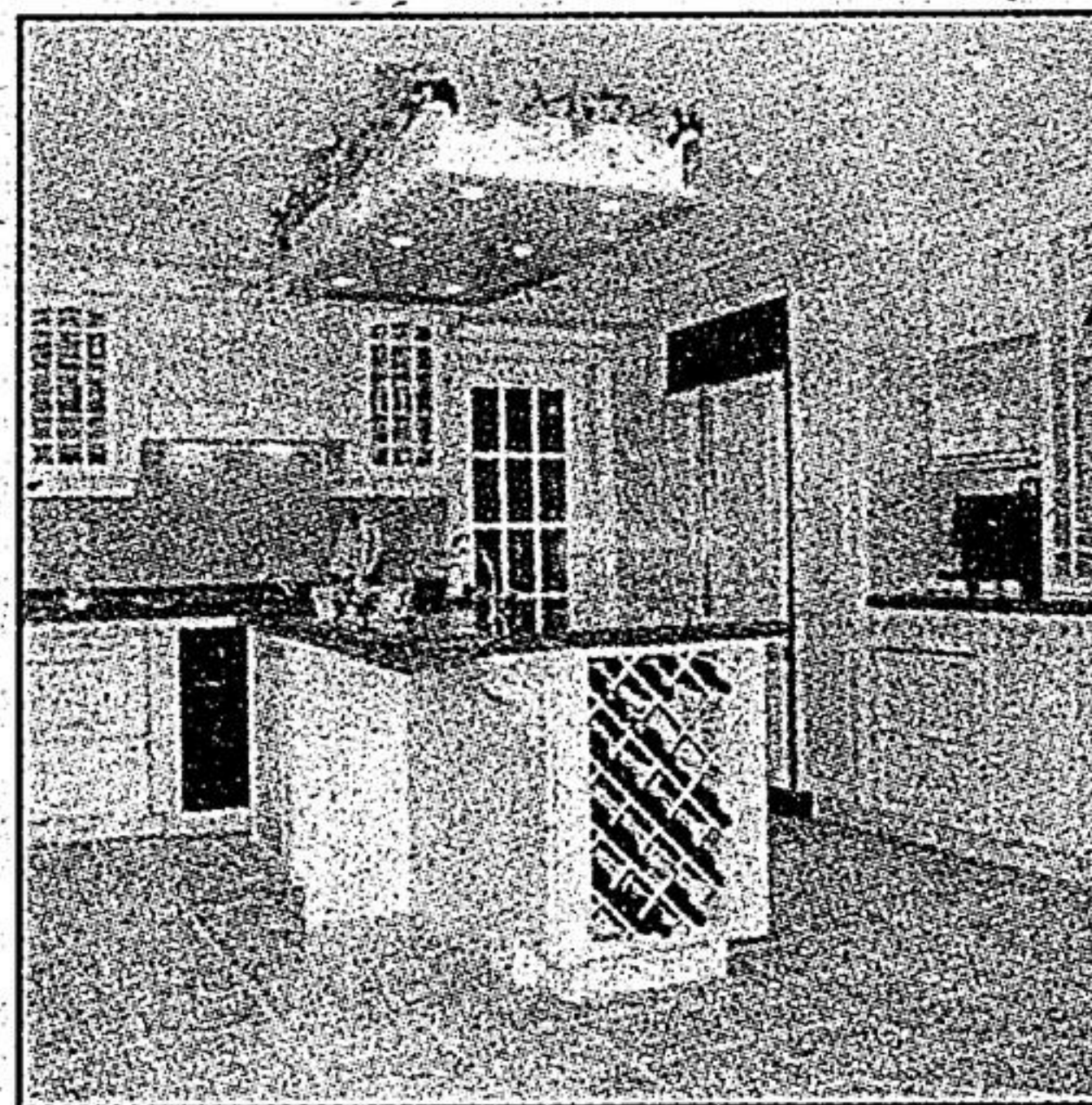
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