



## FRIENDS OF THE MADISON

*Dedicated to reviving the Madison Theater as a cornerstone of community life and economic development in Pine Hills.*

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### **March 30, 2005, 7:30 p.m. St. Andrew's Church, Parish Hall**

#### **Agenda**

Welcome and Brief Update

Introductions

Speakers:

Mayor Gerald Jennings

Bruce Wendell, partner with Joe Tesiero, new owners of Madison Theater

Review of March 8th Community Discussion

Open Discussion:

"What can Friends of the Madison do to help the new owners of the Madison succeed?"

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**Our thanks to St. Andrew's Church for hosting tonight's meeting in the Parish Hall.** [Note: The Church was recently placed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places. It was built in 1930.]

Note: The following is a brief recap of the discussions which occurred during the meeting and not a full set of minutes.

#### **I. Friends of the Madison Update -**

The intent of the Steering Committee is to continue working towards the success of the theater and the good of the neighborhood. Our plan is to turn our attention to supporting the new owners and also to facilitate partnerships between the Madison and the surrounding businesses, neighborhoods and institutions.

Before we knew that the new owner would be found so quickly, the Steering Committee was considering a more formal structure for our organization, probably incorporating and possibly registering as a 501c3. We're going to keep talking about the best structure for us to move forward over the next few months. We will be establishing committees and welcome your participation.

WMHT has asked us to help with a documentary they are producing about what it was like to go to the movies in the past. If you have fond memories of the Madison from earlier times, and would be willing to be interviewed on tape, please mark a Yes in the "WMHT" column on the sign in sheet [or contact us]. We will pass that information along to the producer, and they will be getting in touch with people. Filming is expected to take place over the summer and the piece will air in the fall.

**II. Mayor Jerry Jennings** thanked the Friends for their involvement and encouraged them to remain working on the theater and other neighborhood issues. He announced the formation of a task force that would address urban design and parking issues in the Madison neighborhood. Friends of the Madison will be involved in the task force.

### III. Review of Community Discussion on March 8th

A powerpoint presentation and handouts reviewed the discussion on March 8th. At least 130 people attended the meeting, 38 people spoke and almost 90 returned surveys. (Powerpoint text and survey results attached).

### IV. Discussion with Bruce Wendell

Bruce Wendell, a co-owner with Joe Tesiero of the Emerald Theaters in Amsterdam and now the Madison Theater, discussed the plans for the theater and responded to audience questions and suggestions. (Note: Initial comment is from an audience member, bulleted/indented items are remarks by Bruce Wendell and/or the Amsterdam manager, Rob.)

#### Movie Theater Format

Will this be a mainstream first-run movie theater? Or will it include alternative/art films?

- The Spectrum has that art and 1st-run niche, but we would entertain the idea if that is what you are interested in; we might be able to choose an art film to show using a committee (Call for show of hands for those in favor of showing art/alternative films - majority raise hands.)

Would like to see independent films

- He would like to work with a community committee for alternative/art films to discuss which ones, what types we like.

Can you use demographics to determine selections?

- They can, but the statistics are not truly representative of tastes and committee would offer better information

Have you had discussions with Spectrum? Could you have an agreement about what each theater would show?

- While he believes there was some sort of arrangement between the Spectrum and the Madison, they aren't considering that at this point. It's important that the Madison not try to duplicate the Spectrum, but develop its own niche.

Bring back Looney tunes (cartoons) before films! (Audience agreement)

- Can be put in rolling stock before film

#### Community Events/Target Audiences

What about the possibility of establishing a promotional VIP club whose members will get advanced screenings, etc. Frequent movie passes – books of tickets?

- They are interested in ideas like this and want to know what benefits might interest people in participating in this kind of thing. They cannot do everything because of distribution and contracts with movie companies but will try their best.

Will you work with community groups so they can use theater for fundraising events?

- Yes, they do this in Amsterdam, groups rent out theater; organized by an agency or organization

Would you consider film festivals and other similar events? Examples offered of theaters in Hudson and Catskill that are offering these. Perhaps having the endorsement of a well-known film critic would help promote film festivals?

- Couldn't do it successfully in Amsterdam, there is difficulty to do so with distribution companies, but would love to try. Again, a community booking committee might help here.

New York Writers Institute has had a classic film festival for 20 years and SUNY now needs to refurbish Page hall. There are a lot of groups who would be interested in using your spaces for programming.

- Wants to meet them, likes idea. Wants to take it a step further. He understands that the community “wants class and dignity” here to set the theater aside from everyone else.

Senior housing in Pine Hills has a large population of Russians and the community also has immigrants from India, Asia, South America. Lots of different ethnic groups that call this neighborhood and city home, should take advantage of that, perhaps once a month?

- Would love to have a committee working with us to help select films.

College student-concern over price of tickets increasing; theater and St. Rose community go way back and they want to be able to continue to attend.

- Projected price schedule 7.50 adults; 6.50 matinees; 5.50 children and seniors. The Madison will try to work with CSR to create incentives for students to attend. Movie distributors frown on discounts and that restricts the owners flexibility to offer straight discounts.

Would you consider college nights? Midnight movies?

- Would love to entertain ideas of catering to students. Which night for midnight movies? (Answer is Thurs or Friday.)

Can you consider using SUNY Albany “Podium Plus” card as payment option? This is like a debit card used on campus.

- They will investigate the possibility

Could you work with local schools, offer tickets as achievement rewards?

- Yes, they do that sort of thing in Amsterdam and expect to do the same here  
[Note - Police Dept. has since expressed an interest in getting tickets for PALS program.]  
[Subsequent discussions indicate accommodating kid birthday groups]

### Management

What will the name be?

- The Madison Theater. There will be no name change (applause).

Will you be selling pre-film advertisements, either national commercials or stills for local businesses?

- Yes for local business, haven't signed contract for national commercials. He doesn't want to use the national commercial ads, although it is an important source of income, because he feels it detracts from movie; would love to use pre-film time for local ads. (Show of hands indicates strong preference for local still ads vs. national 'rolling stock')

Are you planning a grand opening?

- Currently, we are talking about a “soft opening” with one theater at a time. We want people to find us, no plans yet for big opening, but would like to know what community wants

How long before you know how quickly you will open the rest of the theaters?

- Within a month.

When will we know if it will be a 5 or 7 screen theater?

- Need to see how scheduling works out; the more screens there are, the more movies and flexibility you have. But he wants to hear what community has to say.

What are the projected hours of operation and employment opportunities?

- 30 employed in Amsterdam, 10 full time, something similar at the Madison.
- Hours: Thurs. Fri. matinees @ 1 pm, weekends 11am-9:30 pm. During school vacations, we'll have a full slate (11 am-9:30 pm) every day. Wants to discuss with neighborhood what are the best hours for us.

For refreshments, what types of food are you considering and will you be working with local businesses?

- Likes the idea of offering locally produced, alternative foods besides traditional fare.

Old owners didn't put cleaners on films so they were all scratched; sound was horrible and it would bleed through theaters

- They were aware of the bleed-through issues, Joe Tesiero is working on the issue and it's a priority. Definitely will have cleaners on films

Story of going to movies at Crossgates and dealing with surly ticket sellers, ticket takers, refreshment staff, etc. On the other hand, the staff at the Spectrum is nice, they offer headphones for those hard of hearing. Quality of service is important.

- Believes in welcoming, friendly, upbeat environment, believes in handshake and smiles. Wants to make us happy with the movie and the service. Wants first name service and will have a local manager – Ed – who will get to know the community. (Anne Savage adds that Ed is looking for an apartment, anyone with suggestions, please contact Friends of the Madison)

#### Building space use/Building issues

How much to do you plan to renovate?

- New rugs needed and chairs need to be fixed in theaters; basic layout will remain the same.

Possibility of converting one screen to a stage for performances such as dinner theater and cabaret acts?

- Willing to entertain idea of stage

Could you include an IMAX theater?

- IMAX distributors have not been receptive to demographics in Albany area.

Would you consider converting former Clapp's storefront back to retail which would make more rental income?

- They've been pleasantly surprised by the interest in the retail spaces, but getting rid of 2 screens will complicate dealing with distributors. The additional theaters are useful for moving older films to smaller spaces and using larger theaters for new arrivals. It might also impact the possibility of showing art films and special screenings. But they will see how the business evolves and what the community wants.

Is it possible to uncover some of the original architectural features?

- Joe Tesiero, who could not attend the meeting, is directing the construction work. Putting a new roof on is the first necessity. They want to incorporate art deco look into the redesign and redecorating, however a return to the original look would require a complete re-design on the interior and they are not presently contemplating that.

What about repairing the exterior elements – stained glass windows and a piece of the frieze?

- They are planning to keep the appearance the same; Bruce can't comment on the plans, we need to ask Joe about specific elements.

### Retail Tenants

Can you try and get Jeff's pizza back?

- If you want Jeff's we'll try to get Jeff's back (large showing of hands)

Could the retail spaces include a Brew Pub?

- (Consensus is that the retail spaces are too small to accommodate this type of operation.)

Are there basements for retail stores which might create more space for kitchens, storage etc.?

- Not sure, would have to look at blueprints and talk to Joe. (Friends of the Madison is not aware of any basements for the retail spaces)

### Neighborhood Issues

As the new owners of one of the largest properties on the block, we encourage you to set an example by arranging for early trash pickup, maintaining street trees, and shoveling snow so that those walking to work in the early morning can have a better environment. Consider working with neighborhood business to keep up block, cigarette butts and garbage

- They understand that a public perception of the block as being clean and safe is very important. Kids are encouraged to help keep Amsterdam theater clean, and they may try similar tactics here.

## **V. Notes on Open Discussion: How FOTM Can Help**

### Program:

Friends of the Madison could do a survey on the e-mail list to encourage participation and get sample of type of movies we've seen and like.

### Promote:

We want to make the success part of a community process.

As volunteers/ambassadors, we can promote the theater to our coworkers and friends.

Can they produce ticket passes or booklets.

Facilitate cross marketing with other Upper Madison businesses

Reward kids for community involvement, improving the neighborhood, good behavior in theater with movie passes.

### Neighborhood and Theater Image

We can foster a neighborhood clean up – that's not just for the businesses, we will do what we have to do to keep Madison looking clean and making it safe; arrange cleanups via e-mail list.

We could provide hands-on help for start up and routine maintenance work.

Raise money to help restore missing architectural elements to preserve character of the building.

Selling nameplates for chairs, VIP club (Bruce thought it was a "classy" idea).

Encourage the owners to police retail storefronts to be classy /set standards for tenants.