



Bones Theatre Ushering a Movie Revival

Company: Bones Theatre
Address: 655 N. Opportunity Drive
Telephone: (260) 244-0051
Web site: www.bonestheatre.com
Management: Chris Jones, co-owner
Employees: Two full-time employees; 15 part-time employees

Background:

Bones Theatre, Columbia City's first cinema in more than three decades, opened in February 2007. Built in Armstrong Industrial Park, it is expected to attract between 110,000 and 130,000 visitors annually. Currently boasting four screens, it will add two in 2008.

Jones reflects, "About four or five years ago as the community was growing, the number one (question) in the editorial pages of the newspapers was, 'If we could bring anything to Columbia City, what would it be?' The answer was 'a movie theatre.'"

What's in a name?:

Nicknamed Bones, Chris Jones didn't intend to become the theatre's namesake.

"We didn't want to name it 'Columbia City Theatre' because we didn't want to alienate all of the communities that were nearby (such as Churubusco and other areas within the county)," Jones states. "We wanted them to feel like it was their theatre as well."

Consequently, he and business partner Timothy DuVall temporarily listed "Bones Theatre" as the company name in various documents while considering options. Focused on other planning details, they forgot to change the name once they reached the final planning stages.

"So it (naming the theatre after himself) wasn't a vanity thing," Jones points out with a laugh.

Domino effect:

In addition to contributing directly to Columbia City's economy, the theatre promises to generate revenue for the community by attracting business to nearby establishments. For example, industry statistics reveal that approximately 71% of moviegoers combine their experience with dining out and 61% with shopping.

BONES THEATRE

Unique technology:

Bones Theatre is the only one in Indiana, according to Jones, that employs MoPix technology for the visually and hearing impaired.

The Descriptive Video Service plays dialogue and narrates background action for the blind via headphones. For the deaf, a Rear Window Captioning Display provides closed captioning onto a lightweight plexiglas reflector. Dialogue appears without distracting other patrons because it reflects off of a wall behind them.

Staff members have learned phrases in sign language such as 'more,' 'please,' 'thank you' and 'you're welcome' to enhance interaction with hearing impaired guests.

Family friendly:

Each Wednesday, Bones Theatre plays movies at no charge as part of its Free Family Film Festival. Appropriately rated movies released within the last year are featured. Showings begin at 10 a.m. and noon. Jones added the latter option due to customer demand. An average of 450 children attends each week.

"It gives them an opportunity to come to a film that maybe they economically could not have gone to," he comments. "And it's good business for us (in terms of concession sales and word of mouth advertising). If you get the kids coming out, the parents come out as well."

Fine print:

Individuals can receive additional discounts on admission and concession items by subscribing to Bones Theatre's electronic newsletter via its web site. Only subscribers are privy to promotions revealed in the biweekly newsletter – such as receiving free popcorn for wearing a hat to the stadium or by declaring 'I love Bones Theatre!' when purchasing tickets.



Chris Jones feels that Bones Theatre helps satisfy a large community need.

Star treatment:

Guests of honor at children's birthday celebrations hosted by Bones Theatre receive admission to a matinee showing, a kids' combo snack package and birthday greetings displayed on the Bones Theatre marquee.

Advertising opportunities:

Jones draws upon his 20 years of experience in the sales industry to promote Bones Theatre. A

major theme in his marketing strategy is a focus on fun.

Local radio stations, for instance, often buy tickets to entire showings to give away. Also, business advertisements with unique twists are displayed prior to and following feature presentations.

"There are what I call two fluffs (which he describes as local, movie or music trivia) included with every advertisement," Jones asserts. He also incorporates sound effects to enliven promotional pieces. One example involves a local train-themed restaurant whose advertisement is accompanied by a train whistle. In another ad promoting concession food, he and family members recorded themselves chewing crunchy popcorn.

"We're grooming this generation (of moviegoers)," Jones asserts. "You have to rehabilitate people to go to the movies again because they haven't had that. They don't think about going."

Coming attractions:

Jones plans to build four additional theatres in several communities over the next 15 years.

"We wanted this to be the Whitley County movie theatre." The expansion will come "in the northern half of the state in communities just like Columbia City where the big boys don't want to play," Jones remarks, "where you build six or eight (screens) and you're under the radar. They want to build 10 to 20 and that's not really our formula for success."



Technology behind the scenes transfers movies from reel to screen.