

MARKETplace

Beacon Cinema looks to sharpen competitive edge

Reclining seats, reduced prices part of strategy to attract more moviegoers

BY JOHN TOWNES

After completely renovating its six auditoriums with new recliner seats, fresh carpeting and other features, the Beacon Cinema is now revamping its pricing and ticketing policies, as part of its effort to bolster its competitive position and attract audiences to the downtown Pittsfield multiplex theater.

On Dec. 15, the Beacon will launch a new reduced pricing structure for tickets.

In addition, moviegoers will have the option of selecting what seats they want when they purchase tickets. They can also make their purchases in advance online, as well as at the theater itself.

"We want to create a theater space that is accessible, welcoming and affordable," said Lydia Shulman, manager of the Beacon, at 57 North St.

The change will coincide with a national cinematic event that is expected to draw crowds that will make these added conveniences especially welcome – the opening of *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*.

The new seating and other changes are part of a business plan to increase attendance at the Beacon, a six-screen multiplex that opened in 2009 following a multi-year redevelopment project.

In addition to bolstering the Beacon Cinema as a business, the changes are also a facet in local community and economic revitalization efforts in Pittsfield.

"One of the goals for the Beacon Cinema has always been to contribute to revitalization in Pittsfield," said Shulman. "We believe by offering a great destination for family entertainment at a lower cost, this will bring more people downtown."

In the 1990s the city included a downtown movie theater as a goal in its revitalization strategies. The idea stayed in limbo for several years, until developer Richard Stanley of Great Barrington purchased the commercial block, originally known as the Kinnell-Kresge Building, which extends from McKay Street to North Street.

In a public-private partnership, Stanley (who also owns The Triplex Cinema in Great Barrington) undertook an extensive restoration and expansion of the building as a mixed-use development, and established the Beacon Cinema as an anchor. The over-



Beacon Cinema manager Lydia Shulman demonstrates the new premium reclining seats at the downtown Pittsfield theater. Although installation of the seating cut the Beacon's capacity by more than half, moviegoers will actually see ticket prices drop, beginning with the Dec. 15 opening of the latest *Star Wars* film.

all project was funded with a combination of private investment, tax credits and other public incentives.

The Beacon Cinema opened in November 2009 to much local fanfare, with a gala grand opening ceremony attended by local officials and other residents.

However, like other movie theaters, the Beacon has had to contend with a highly competitive entertainment environment, including the increased popularity of DVDs, online streaming of movies, and ever-larger TV screens and other advanced home-theater technology.

That has caused movie theaters to adapt new strategies, such as offering more comfortable seating, and the addition of other amenities to enhance the experience and convenience of going out to the movies.

The Beacon's new pricing has different levels, depending on the time, type of film and attendee's age.

As of Dec. 15, tickets for matinees are \$6. For 2D evening films, tickets are \$8.75 for adults, and \$6 for children and seniors.

For 3D films, prices are \$11.75 adults, and \$9 for children and seniors.

This is a reduction from the previous prices, which have been \$8 for matinees, \$10 for evening shows for adults, and \$7.50 for children and seniors, with a \$3 surcharge for 3D films.

(By comparison, at the Regal Berkshire Mall 10 multiplex in Lanesboro, the basic price for an adult evening ticket for a 2D movie is \$12.15, and \$10.15 for child or senior.)

The new pricing grew out of the renovation of the auditoriums, according to Robert Flower of Prospect Marketing of Stockbridge, who is working with the Beacon on the changes.

"We listened to the public," said Flower.

He explained that as a compensation to audiences for the inconveniences caused by the reconstruction work this summer, the Beacon offered special scratch-ticket promotions, which included free or discounted movie tickets as prizes. He said about 8,000 scratch tickets were distributed.

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"We were shocked by the high level of response," he said. "It was clear that there was a strong demand for the discounted tickets. We decided if that's what people want, then we'll lower our prices overall."

Flower added that one goal is to provide an affordable entertainment alternative for families.

"Taking the kids out can get expensive when you add up the tickets for many attractions," he said. "We want to be the local, family-friendly, value-priced cinema in the Berkshires."

As part of the investment, the Beacon spent \$550,000 on the new seats, which are plush leather recliners with electric adjustments (*July 2017 BT&C*).

The theater's strategy also includes putting more people in fewer overall seats. To allow for the larger size of the recliners, the total number of seats was reduced from 850 to about 300, with between 51 and 70 seats per auditorium.

Flower and Shulman said the investment and reduction in capacity will be worth it if the enhanced quality and lower prices succeed in attracting more moviegoers.

"It's a different experience, and the auditoriums feel more like screening rooms now," said Flower.

Shulman noted that she grew up in the Boston area, which is known for quality theaters.

"I was able to go to movies in some great theaters there," she said. "Now, with these changes, the Beacon is on a par with the best city theaters in Boston." ♦

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