

Reviving a cinema to preserve a neighbourhood

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Cheri DiNovo, the MPP for Parkdale-High Park, is standing under a black-and-white photo of the old Revue Cinema marquee, the actual marquee having suddenly collapsed right off the building some months ago.

An ominous sign, surely.

The photo showcases the cinema in its heyday, when Ronald Colman starred in *My Life With Caroline* (a dizzy boy-chases-girl affair, according to *The New York Times*, circa 1941) and Mickey Rooney headlined in *Love is a Heartache*.

Long before, that is, the arrival of big-box stores, screaming mega movie chains and shopping malls the size of small cities and long, long before June 30 of last year when the Revue screened *The Wizard of Oz* and closed its doors.

A second ago, DiNovo had been quoting Margaret Mead, that line about never doubting the power of a small group of citizens to change the world.

There are citizens gathered under a bright, bright sun, listening to the news of the Revue's rescue, standing alongside Councillor Gord Perks, dressed in a very warm looking black suit he bought for the last election, and school trustee Irene Atkinson and the tireless band of neighbours who created the Revue Film Society, determined, against long odds, to resuscitate the movie house.

Of course, the story became a business story, a story about money, which the society desperately needed if it hoped to purchase the business and get her up and running again.

Anyone around here have \$1.2 million to spare? That was the asking price, says Danny Mullin, who lives in the 'hood, has worked in construction (Smiths Falls) and for cleaning crews (Jarvis House, El Mocambo) and the city (refuse collection). At 78, he owns a few buildings here and there.

Mullin paid \$954,000 for the Revue, which is located on Roncesvalles Ave. Buying is the easy part, "like taking chocolates off a baby," he says, dressed in Merrill hikers and trekking shorts and a hat not unlike those worn by the French Foreign Legion in their desert forays. "I talk to the person who's selling. I always tell them, put your price down. You're going to have a one-shot deal. If I like what I see, then we're in business."

They're in business now, the film society and Mullin, with the society, which will run the show, committed to paying Mullin a monthly sum of seven grand.

The society has raised \$30,000 toward operating expenses. "We need another \$60,000 before we'll be able to open the doors at the end of August," says Susan Flanagan, the film society's founder. The society's clever marketing line: "Opening soon: a theatre near you."

You don't hear that kind of talk these days. Neighbourhood theatres are a near-dead breed.

Flanagan talks about the society's vision for the Revue: diverse, dynamic, "a place for people to connect."

It's much more than entertainment. Neighbourhoods build social capital. Social capital is good – trusting networks, common values, positive norms. The great Robert Putnam once wrote that a decline in neighbourhood social capital is one important feature of the inner-city crisis.

We have to keep our neighbourhoods whole.

Which is why Cheri DiNovo is standing before the group announcing that she is personally donating \$1,000 to the cause, "and I'm challenging everyone here to match me."

Irene Atkinson hands over a cheque. Danny Mullin says he will put in a matching grand. MP Peggy Nash has sent a cheque by proxy.

Gord Perks's shoulders slump. He smiles a small smile. "Okay, I'll match them," he says.

In the 1980s, Perks saw his first Truffaut film at the Revue, *The 400 Blows*. He loves the place.

He loves the neighbourhood. He calls it a village.

Priceless.

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