

Revue Cinema rescued

Closed theatre bought by working-class hero from Liverpool, who lets film society take over

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With his 79th birthday just a few weeks away, Danny Mullin feels qualified to pronounce upon life.

"It's a joke," he says. "Anybody could do what I've done. But most people won't ..."

Mullin left school at 14 and has never held a job more exalted than docker, cleaner, garbage collector or barkeep. But he was thrifty and bought real estate. He and his wife, Letty, 67, live in a modest flat by High Park. They own the 21-unit building and three other sites.

What Mullin is doing now is saving the historic Revue Cinema on Roncesvalles Ave., a feat that even keep-it-alive campaigners feared was impossible.

The 245-seat theatre opened in 1912. Until it closed last June, it was one of Canada's oldest continually operating cinemas. Mullin is buying it for almost \$1 million and will lease it to the Revue Film Society. It needs to raise \$60,000 but hopes to reopen it by the end of summer as a non-profit enterprise.

Susan Flanagan, founder of the film society, says when the Revue closed, she and other enthusiasts called a meeting "expecting 10 to 15 people" and got closer to 40, including the owners regretful about having to close it down.

Festival Cinemas also closed its Royal, Kingsway and Paradise theatres. Toronto now has only a handful of independent cinemas.



Danny Mullin, with his wife Letty, is putting up the hard cash to allow the Revue Cinema, which began in silent film era, to resume operations.

ASHLEY HUTCHESON/TORONTO STAR

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Reviving a cinema to preserve a neighbourhood

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.

What to do? "We went through all kinds of scenarios," Flanagan says. "And then a light bulb went on: Why don't we form a corporation and lease the Revue building?"

But those interested in buying the building wanted to change its use. "The big fear was that someone would turn it into a dollar store," Flanagan says. "We papered the neighbourhood: 'Contact us if you want to help.'"

And Danny Mullin emerged. "He's always wanted his own movie house," says Letty.

Mullin saw the 'For Sale' sign and that was it.

"I told the society, 'I'm buying this place; now you can run it.'"

It's a Hollywood happy ending, says Flanagan. Just as Flanagan's story is a rags-to-riches romance.

Mullin came to Canada from his hometown, Liverpool, in 1959 but still has a "Scouse" accent you could cut with a knife. He jumps from topic to topic, his face lighting up. He and his wife stand outside the Revue and recall how they met.

"She was the bookkeeper at the UoF faculty club and I was the bartender," he says. "I gave her the old Scouser wink. She's from the Philippines. She'd be saying to people, 'What's he want?' I said, 'I'm gonna marry you.' She didn't know what hit her.

"I was a waiter... a cleaner... a garbage collector. I always had two or three jobs at the same time. I get by on three hours sleep a night. I'm better than Winston Churchill. He always said he needed four.

"Your hours as a docker were 52 a week. Why do you keep printing that people are working more hours these days? It's a joke.

"I've got no education but I could never turn work down. My dad was a carter ... two horses and a cart. He always said, 'If you're gonna be a labourer, be the best.'"

"I always loved movies. That was our life. My mother had eight kids. She made sure we went to the Saturday matinees. I'd follow horse carts for the manure. Sell it to people for their roses. Good money."

Now, Mullin sees police horses and shakes his head. "That manure... People run away from it but it's good stuff, if they only knew.

"I ran four marathons. I'd run from Port Credit to Long Branch, training. These are runner's legs. I have angina now and a pacemaker. I can't run anymore. But I'm always on the move. I'll never wait for anything. I'll always start walking.

"I'm the same weight as I've always been." He points to his mouth. "This is for talking, not eating."

Mullin pauses for breath. His wife says wryly, "He's exhausting at times." Then he's off again.

"When I was 12, the teacher told kids what they'd be - engineers, draftsmen... He told me, 'No worry, you can always be a dustman.'"

He grins. "I wish he was alive now."

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