

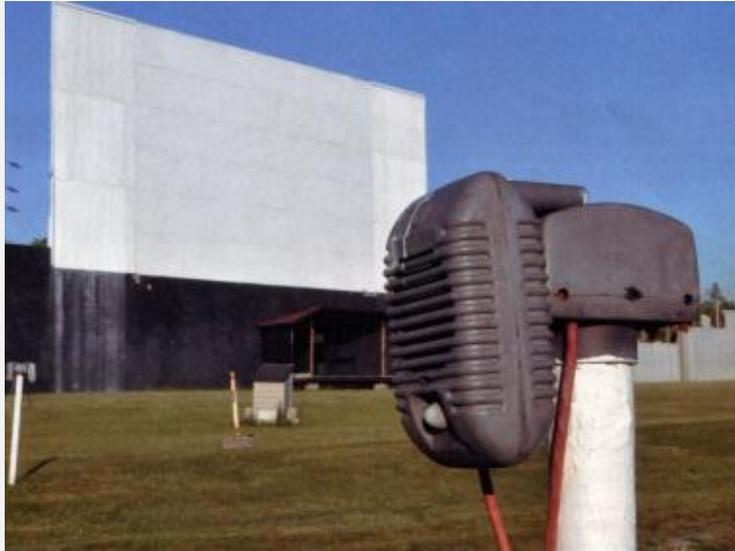
Saving Skyview Drive-In – Rt. 88, Carmichaels, PA

by Tara Kinsell, *Observer-Reporter Staff Writer* Tkinsell@observer-reporter.com, Feb. 8, 2013

CARMICHAELS – The time has come for drive-in theaters to change with the times or fade away. Celluloid will cease production this spring. Any unused film stock will be used for a few months, and after that, digital will replace it for good.

The Skyview Drive-In in Carmichaels is in danger of shutting down. If that happens, it could be for a short time, it could last for years, or Skyview’s run could be over.

Owners Elizabeth and Charles Walker are doing everything in their power to ensure that does not happen. They join the remaining 368 drive-in theater owners in operation across the country who must incur a debt of \$75,000 per screen to modernize. The Walker’s two-screen operation will take twice that amount and then some. They have created a donation page, hoping the community-at-large will help keep Skyview operating for the next generation.



Saving the Skyview and other drive-in movie theaters from extinction is coming down to a community effort. (Tara Kinsell / Observer-Reporter)

“Rumor has it at this point that we will be OK for this summer for film. The last thing we heard was in May or June one of the studios was not going to put movies on film and go strictly digital,” Charles Walker said. “Then that studio said, ‘no,’ they weren’t going to be the first to make that decision.”

There is an option on the table for drive-in owners to help ease the financial burden. However, certain criteria must be met. The window to meet them and sign on the dotted line is slim.

“It is looking positive, but it’s not written in stone,” Charles Walker said. This option wasn’t available just a short while ago for smaller, seasonal venues like Skyview. The details are still not clear. However, it is a take-it or leave-it proposition, he said.

“Worst case, we could shut down for a few months or years and come back and open back up,” he said. “If we do that, we are on our own. The decision has to be made in the next two to four weeks. We are doing everything we can do to try to raise the funding and also to ensure we can stay open and not lose it.”

Another option will allow drive-ins to offer on-screen advertising and messages that will run before movies and during intermission. Of course, this, too, requires some out-of-pocket money in the form of a digital conversion fee. The ad revenue will be a help in the long run, but the short term is still the issue.

The Walkers return Saturday from a week in Kissimmee, Fla. It wasn’t a time for fun in the sun. The time was spent in meetings and negotiations at the annual United Drive-In Theater Owners’ Association convention.

What is being offered does not defray the cost of converting to digital projectors. It doesn't help the Walkers erect a new building that is dust-free and climate controlled year-round, something that is required for digital projectors. It does not cover the extra cost to change from analog to digital sound.

What the offer does include are digital virtual print fees, something Skyview was not eligible to previously receive. In simple terms, virtual print fees are amounts paid per movie to help offset the costs of new equipment.

It would not be a large influx of cash all at once, like the Walkers need.

"We have not met the conditions yet. There are deadlines. You have to be up and operational by a certain date to even be eligible," said Elizabeth Walker.

She has recently reached out to fans of the Skyview via Facebook asking for their help in saving the 67-year-old venue. While the couple was in Florida this week, some members of the Carmichaels community were brainstorming.

The Carmichaels Women's Civic Club voted at its meeting to hold a fundraiser for the drive-in. Teachers at Carmichaels Area Elementary School were discussing ways to jump on the bandwagon. Donations have been made at the "Help the Skyview Drive-In convert to digital" account on www.fundrazr.com.

"I am glad and deeply touched by that," said Charles Walker. "All we can do is keep working on it on our end."