



Seems he has the whole world

IN HIS PALMS

Native Texan brings his grand style to new movie palace

By Katie Foutz



Ted Bulthaupt, owner of the Hollywood Blvd Cinema and the new Hollywood Palms Cinema in Naperville sits on top of a 70 foot wide, two story tall cascading waterfall behind the usher stand at the new Palms location. Opulence and customer satisfaction are goals for Bulthaupt, a Downers Grove South High alum.

Anyone who has been to Hollywood Blvd Cinema knows the owners style. BIG!

Cinema owner Ted Bulthaupt brought that style to his new Naperville movie theater, Hollywood Palms Cinema celebrates its grand opening is this weekend at 352 S. Route 59 hosted by Roger Ebert and Oscar-winning actor Richard Dreyfuss. Tall palm trees, bamboo, coffee plants and other tropical greenery nearly scrape the ceiling of the entryway's glass atrium. A two story, seventy foot wide, cascading waterfall in the lobby was designed by Bulthaupt and built by a company that specializes in outdoor zoo enclosures turns any conversation up to shouting range. An art deco pair of gold winged men flanking the screen in one auditorium stand 17 feet tall and were movie props in the 20th Century Fox warehouse. This is a true movie palace.

Each auditorium has a different color scheme and decorative theme, ranging from the Deep Blue Sea to an Egyptian Tomb decked out in gold. Bulthaupt attributes his big style to his native state of Texas. "Everything is bigger there," he said pointing to a massive framed painting of the Alamo behind his equally massive desk stacked full with papers.

He also has some big name connections. Among people he calls friends are Karen Allen who starred opposite Harrison Ford in "Raiders of the Lost Ark". She's making personal appearances at both Hollywood Palms and Blvd nest weekend to host screenings of the classic adventure film.

He was invited to the 86th birthday party of Margaret Pellegrini, one of the last surviving Munchkins but sent regrets because it happened to be the week of the Hollywood Palms grand opening.



Bulthaupt and his little friend and Munchkin Margaret Pellegrini hosts annual screenings of The Wizard of Oz.

He persuaded heads of multiple film studios, plus Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Ted Turner, Roger Ebert and more to write letters in support of “The Wizard of Oz” Munchkins getting their star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

So he knows people and he speaks in hyperbole—his theaters are the first this and the best that. But Bulthaup is no Donald Trump, who puts his name on everything he builds. He is soft spoken. (“I get accused of mumbling a lot,” he said. He prefers to stay in his office behind a door that says, “Nobody sees the Wizard. Not nobody, not now how.”) “The work speaks for itself, I’m just a tour guide”

To create the cinemas’ grand style, he picks up set pieces while travelling the world. Then he stores them at warehouses or the theater until he can find the perfect place to use them.

“I seem to notice little details that other people don’t, but it’s the little things that add up in the big scheme of things and make the impact,” he said.

He’s not kidding. While giving the tour of the new cinema, Bulthaup took notes out loud. “That blue light bulb is out, that trim needs to be dusted, that chandelier is one bulb short, that placard needs a larger typeface. If they weren’t fixed by the grand opening his vision for the customer experience wouldn’t be complete. He’s been in show business for awhile.

Now in his 50’s, Bulthaup started promoting concerts when he was 17. In 1975 as senior class president at Downers Grove South High School he booked Styx to play a concert in the gym the same month the song “Lady” hit number one on the national charts. He went on to promote concerts and line up outdoor concerts while attending college.

Shifting to the film industry he opened his first movie and dinner theater in downtown Indianapolis in 1991.

“Downtown Indy was dead back then,” he said. Back then we were the only downtown business open on Sunday night, and we were the only operation that wasn’t a get drunk pick up chicks bar type place the other nights of the week.”

He started running both current and classic films shortly after their national release date because studios wouldn’t sell his theater movies immediately because we served liquor. He finally convinced them that “prohibition was over.”

It was in Indianapolis that Bulthaup developed the design sense moviegoers now see in his Woodridge and Naperville cinemas. He would go in

Right: This pair of 17 foot tall gold winged art deco statues came from the 20th Century Fox prop warehouse. Originally built as replicas of the pair on the Hoover Dam, they were last seen on the Ellen DeGeneres show.



Below Left: For the Egyptian auditorium Bulthaup called a friend at Paramount and was able to have a replica of the ark made using the original blueprints from “Raiders.”

early mornings and add things like quarter-round trim and green paint. He says his wife knew he was ready to open another location after he was done “tinkering for ten years in Indy.

”The celebrity personal appearances started in Indianapolis when he had the Munchkins host screenings of “The Wizard of Oz”, but those events came into their own at Hollywood Blvd with the “Star Wars” actors. Then came Michael Madsen with screenings of “Reservoir Dogs” and successive actors from the Harry Potter films at their Chicago openings causing lines around the block.

Hollywood Blvd created a loyal following of moviegoers, with 160,000 subscribers to the weekly email blast with the new movie schedule. Its because of that loyal following that he is expanding now.

Bulthaup had opportunities to expand before. Offers have included Disney’s Pleasure Island but he passed saying he would rather build a cinema for Chicago area locals who would become regular customers than a tourist spot and a one time visit. He backed off co-venturing with Regal Cinemas and later two venture capital groups each promising \$100 million in equity approached him.

While other theaters might struggle to compete for customers, Bulthaup maintains his Hollywood Cinema, Bar & Eateries work because they provide an entire nights entertainment including food and bar with first run films in auditoriums each with their own distinct personalities.

He shows disdain for theaters that that use the same carpeting and décor throughout calling them neon-trimmed film bunkers. They just show movies and the industry phrase labels them exhibitors. “I’m surrounded by a bunch of exhibitionists.”

“I don’t work on the theory of being an exhibitor. I consider us to be in the hospitality business. We take care of the customers. We embrace them as soon as they cross the threshold and treat them to superior sensory experiences from the décor, the service, the sound, the picture; everything they see, hear, smell, taste and feel throughout their visit and they love us for it. Nobody ever likes our theaters, they love them. “Love’ is invariably the word they use. They tell us it’s the best movie-going experience they have ever had.”

“What’s the most frequently heard word here at Hollywood? It’s ‘Wow!’.”

“That’s just what we do”



From the Storyteller

During the past year, Ted Bulthaupt worked many 14-hour days at the new Hollywood Palms Cinema even during the summer when the air-conditioner wasn't working and the indoor temperatures soared.

He said he "lost 30 pounds opening this theater." That's why his three-piece suit is too big. (He wears it with beat-up blue Converse sneakers,)

"People may say my style is kind of strange," he said. Then he rolled his eyes, "But it's show biz." People might also find it strange that Bulthaupt, the owner of two movie theaters, hasn't seen a movie in years. He can't go to his own theater, he said. Some staff member invariably taps him on the shoulder about something. He can't go to anyone else's theater, "because it's junk," he said.

He doesn't watch movies at home because he would rather watch documentaries or feed his news addiction. But he loves the classics. "Lawrence of Arabia" is his favorite The Marx Brothers still crack him up.

And his theaters are well known among fans of "The Wizard of Oz" for personal appearances of the surviving Munchkins. It was through his friendships with the Munchkins that he learned they didn't have their own star in the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Nominating them the first time he could hardly believe they were not accepted. He started a letter writing campaign with powerful friends in the industry and people like the Governor of Kansas - "Because what else is Kansas known for?" The Munchkins got their star in 2008, right in front of the world famous Grauman's Chinese Theater and next to Hollywood's Mayor. "I guess they got the message," Bulthaupt quips. The event received worldwide media coverage and the ceremony is a special feature on the 70th Anniversary Wizard of Oz DVD.

For the ceremony, he had a rainbow made from colorful helium balloons arched over the famous Grauman's forecourt. He hired a carriage pulled by a purple "horse of a different color" to bring them parade style to the ceremony led by the Hollywood High School Band playing "We're Off To See The Wizard". Judy Garland's son, Joey Luft was the keynote speaker. Bulthaupt spent \$250,000 on staging the mammoth event.

So you might call him strange for a number of reasons. But unlike many personalities associated with Hollywood, you can't call him selfish.

- Katie Foutz



Where did he get that?

Hollywood Palms owner Ted Bulthaupt gets his memorabilia, artifacts and architectural pieces from all over. See if you can find the following items on your trip to the theater.



Pair of 1200 lb Carved Elephants

Made in India 250 years ago, these are carved teak, overlaid with pounded brass that were located outside an architectural antiques shop for many years. Bulthaupt finally convinced the owner to sell them for \$13,000.

Spanish Moss & Hanging Vines

Harvested by Bulthaupt often with their branches attached from trees around Charleston, South Carolina and in the Mississippi delta near Vicksburg. Ted even waded hip deep through swamps with branch cutters, carefully selecting, packing and driving them home in a cargo van.

Large Octopus

Fabricated in Florida by company that reproduces large fiberglass game fish from photographs, so fisherman can release their catch but still have a wall trophy.

Six foot tall Bugs Bunny

Bought with a dozen other figures from a closing Warner Bros store.

Full-size Wicked Witch of the West

A limited edition collectors item made for the 70th Anniversary; a friend with an Oz Store offered to pick up one at cost for Ted and deliver it when she came in for the annual screenings of the film. Ted bought four, can't have too many witches in your closet.

Ark of the Covenant

When designing the Egyptian room, Bulthaupt put a "Raiders" twist on the theme by calling a friend at Paramount. He was able to finesse getting an exact copy made from the original prints.

Five foot tall Pink Panther

Bought at the Kane County flea market for \$14.

Granite Chinese Fu Dogs (lions)

A pair of carved green stone temple door guards, weighing in at about a thousand pounds each, bought when Bulthaupt spotted them while driving by a closed Chinese restaurant.

Giant Mayan Wall Carvings

Bulthaupt was so inspired when visiting Mayan ruins in the Yucatan, he combed tourist sites buying 5 dozen different small souvenir plaster castings and shipped them home. Years later when Bulthaupt toured the set for the opening sequence of Indiana Jones and the Search for the Crystal Skull, Karen Allen put him in contact with the Universal Prop Dept., who reproduced 8 castings but giant sized up to 12 foot tall.

Chinese Terracotta Warriors

Exact full-sized replicas of actual individual soldiers originally dug up in Xi'an China, made nearby from the same clay with each weighing from 600 to 800 lbs. Bulthaupt bought an even dozen. They make everything in China!

Life-sized ET Figure

The last collectors piece bought from Steven Spielberg's warehouse in Little Rock, Arkansas.