



Ted Bulthaup's South Meridian Street theater overflows with big screen nostalgia, celebrity guests, food, beer, wine & cocktails.

## New Home Chicago!

### Hollywood Filmworks Plans Windy City Cinema: Ponders Indy Future

by Scott Olson

Hollywood Bar & Filmworks CEO Ted Bulthaup is taking his "dinner and a movie" theater concept to suburban Chicago while he mulls the future of his longtime downtown venue.

With the backing of about 20 influential investors, ranging from National Lampoon executive Dan Laikin to David Letterman's lawyer Ronald Elberger, Bulthaup is set to open the six-screen cinema in Woodridge, Ill., by Christmas.

Called Hollywood Blvd Cinema, the hallway to the auditoriums is being paved with black tennis court paint with center stripes, old parking meters that Bulthaup salvaged from the famous Hollywood Boulevard in California line the edges, with a mosaic of various sized black and white stills from classic films filling the walls similar to the lobby at Filmworks. Each auditorium will have uniquely themed décor ranging from Chinese to Egyptian with its own separate color scheme.

The seven-figure investment represents the first in what Bulthaup envisions as a Midwestern chain of 10 or more similarly themed theaters. More Chicago-area locations are likely targets.

"Everybody really sees this as a slam dunk," the 46-year-old Bulthaup said. "With these guys and the money they've got, we have the wherewithal to do pretty much whatever we want."

In the meantime, Bulthaup's lease at his redeveloped 130 year old warehouse South Meridian Street location expires in February. The DePaul University grad and former concert promoter opened Hollywood in 1991. A in major expansion of the theater in 1997 and a move from showing second to first-run films has helped the independent cinema-bar-restaurant stay profitable.

In recent years Bulthaup, also President of the local restaurant association, has become a vocal critic of the high event parking rates he claims are keeping patrons from frequenting downtown establishments during Conesco Fieldhouse events. He estimated his revenue and many of his neighbors have suffered by 20 percent to 30 percent since the fieldhouse opened in 1999.

"I would love to be headquartered in Indianapolis," Bulthaup said. "All my investors are here, but that depends on city policy."

The city has instituted a handful of cheaper parking changes in the past few years, said Deputy Mayor Melina Kennedy. On fieldhouse event nights, parking prices for city and Capital Improvement Board-owned lots near the venue have been cut to \$3, and parking is available on the top floor of the fieldhouse garage for \$2. On Meridian Street, it costs \$3 to park in the Union Station garage on event nights, Kennedy said. Bulthaup rebuts saying a handful of spaces just doesn't do the job.

Bulthaup cited the downtown exodus of such small retail businesses as Brenner Luggage, Kipp Brothers and ReisNichols as examples of the city's lackluster support for independent enterprise. Kennedy disagreed.

"Ted's a good person to work with and I think his expansion in Chicago is great," she said. "But we've had a lot of positive feedback [about parking], because when it comes down to it, there are options available for \$3 or less." Bulthaup replies, "her positive anecdotal feedback doesn't show up in the numbers. I have 6000 customer surveys and hundreds of emailed comments. The public won't trade convenience for a handful of lower-priced spaces. Downtown will never thrive in this environment, people just won't come all the way downtown and pay to park when the average space inflates 735% on event nights due to a game they are not attending. The restaurants, bars, the comedy club and my theater are empty. The public just stays near home in the suburbs. It's stupid to think otherwise."

In Woodridge, by comparison, the strip mall housing Hollywood Boulevard, A Cinema Bar & Eatery, has more than 1,000 free spaces in its parking lot. And, Bulthaup said, annual restaurant sales within a five-mile radius of the mall top \$330 million. Woodridge is a far-west Chicago suburb bordered by affluent neighbors like Naperville and Downers Grove.

Bulthaup estimates he needs to sell 4,000 movie tickets a week at his new location to reap \$1 million in annual profit, a task he said he can accomplish "standing on his head." His confidence and admitted persistence, and the attractive demographics, swayed investors to support the project.

"He wouldn't let you say no," said David Knall, managing director of McDonald Investments and Forbes rated 4th best money manager in the country. "He is one of the hardest-working human beings I have ever known, period, and I know a lot of them."

A private placement issued to raise the necessary funds is oversold. "I hate to turn down money" Bulthaup said. His lawyer/adviser, David Millard of Leagre Chandler & Millard, said the accomplishment is no small feat given the difficult venture capital climate.

"It's a true testament to Ted and his concept".  
"The big theaters have clearly had a rough road these last several years. Ted and his concept are strong enough to persevere through all of that."

Major theater chains such as United Artists Theatres, General Cinemas, Regal Cinemas and Loews Cineplex Entertainment have all experienced financial difficulties.

General Cinemas had operated the six screen complex, but it has been closed for the last three years. Bulthaup will lease from mall operators in Woodridge. In 1999, Bulthaup backed out of a partnership with Regal Cinemas to bring his Hollywood concept to 94 of the company's underperforming theaters after deciding he couldn't operate in their corporate culture. They aren't entrepreneurial, they are in the exhibition industry just putting moving pictures on screens. Like most, there is little concern for the overall customer experience.

I approach my concept as being in the hospitality industry. It's a whole different mind-set that makes all the difference.

"Ted has a proven track record of success in a venue that for many companies has not proven successful," Elberger said. "He has an ability to recognize opportunity and to bring his plans to fruition in a venue the public will enjoy."

Dan Laikin, another investor and COO of National Lampoon in Los Angeles, said his partnership with Bulthaup may create branding opportunities between the companies.

Bulthaup has already spent \$300,000 on décor for the Woodridge theater, he said. He has rented two homes in the Chicago area to give staff members a place to stay. He is taking several key employees with him from his Meridian Street location, including his two grown daughters.

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# THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

## Arts & Entertainment

Sunday, March 28, 2004



Sit back and relax: Hollywood Blvd. show first run movies in a setting that's evocative of the famed Grauman's Chinese Theatre.

# Raising the Bar

Hollywood Bar & Filmworks' owner has supersized his meal-and-movie idea for the Chicago area.

by Bonnie Britton





# Woodridge, Ill —

As a latter day movie palace aficionado, Ted Bulthaup likes to surround big screens with their own personalities.

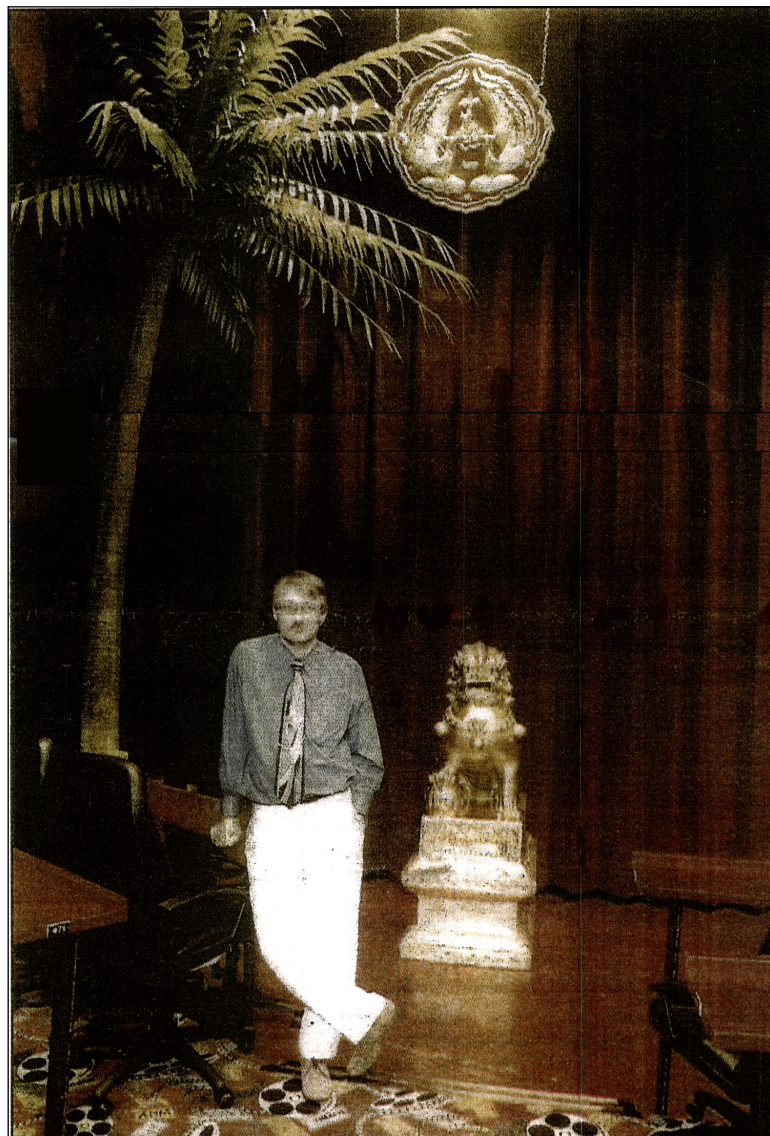
Once a promoter for comedians like Steve Martin and rock groups such as Cheap Trick and Styx, Bulthaup launched, with help from investors, Hollywood Bar & Filmworks in Indianapolis in 1991 and Hollywood Blvd Cinema in Woodridge, Ill., not far from Chicago in 2003.

After a shaky start during the early ddays of the war in Iraq, the Illinois theater is doing “gangbuster” business, said Bulthaup, who worked hours that would scare an insomniac to get the theater up and running.

He’ll tell you he doesn’t consider himself a huge movie buff. But he knows what it takes to get audiences in the door.. Food with actor-and-movie themed names, such as Lord of the Onion Rings or Porta Bella Lugosi, and drinks, delivered by servers, casual individual seating, and décor that is specifically tailored so as to each auditorium are his trademarks.

His approach has not gone unnoticed. Restaurant Business Magazine, a trade journal for the restaurant industry recently named Bulthaup’s food-and-film operation one of the top 10 best new concepts in the country. He has also received CEO Magazine’s Service Excellence Award and Mass/Mutual/U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s Blue Chip Enterprise Award for entrepreneurship. Bulthaup shuns the “bunker mentality” of large movie theater chains where the norm is concrete walls, neat rows of immovable seats, stale candy and popcorn refreshments and drapes on the walls for ambience.

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**Dream theater:** Entrepreneur Ted Bulthaup opened a large-scale version of Hollywood Bar & Filmworks, which he calls Hollywood Blvd Cinema in the Chicago suburb of Woodridge. Life-sized statutes of the Blues Brothers, Jake and Elwood, lounge in the lobby.

# Bar

From Page One

Audiences embraced Bulthaup's Indianapolis theater at 247 South Meridian Street—which is smaller than the Illinois operation - shortly after it opened. In recent years, the faithful who come to see studio films, or classics, or “The Rocky Horror Picture Show”, have endured expensive or hard-to-find parking. Housed in a 130 year old warehouse building near the once bustling Union Station. Hollywood Bar & Filmworks “is holing its own,” he said, doing better than some other downtown businesses.

At Hollywood Blvd., parking's not a problem. The four screen theater (with two other screens in the works) is in a strip mall with direct access to a free 1000 space outside parking lot.

He found the property, a former General Cinema theater that Bulthaup has done considerable renovation, on a trip while attending his 25th high school reunion.

## Finding a Hook

Bulthaup relishes frills and knows what it will take to lure customers to his theaters, whether its teaming up with a car manufacturer to promote “2 Fast, 2 Furious” with deejays broadcasting from a Mitsubishi used in the filming while handing out free passes to potential customers in the



**A fine hello:** A photo of Janet Leigh in the shower scene from Alfred Hitchcock's “Psycho” greets visitors to the women's washroom at Blvd.

crosswalks, or bringing in Munchkins from “The Wizard of Oz” to attract media for screenings of the classic film.

while handing out free passes to potential customers in the crosswalks, or bringing in Munchkins from “The Wizard of Oz” to attract media for screenings of the 1939 classic film.

The setting is spectacularly original yet evocative if the famed Grauman's Chinese Theater.

When you leave here, you feel like you've gotten your money's worth,” Bulthaup said.

“I don't think the public feels that's the case in other tradi-

tional theaters.” Bulthaup labels them neon-trimmed film bunkers.

“People will go to work the next day and say they saw such-and-such title at our theater. If they go someplace else they just talk about the movie, not where they saw it. Nobody cares, the others are all the same.

Studios should be thanking guys like himself, Bulthaup maintains, the chains are too complacent, we keep them on their toes. After they open, they become just a computer read out in the main office. We get out and work the crowds.



You know you are not in a chain theater as soon as you step into Hollywood Blvd.'s lobby, where actual sized photographs of the signed concrete slabs with hand and footprints of the stars in Grauman's forecourt adorn two walls. The bar top features enlarged news photographs of the stars during those ceremonies. Most of the area is a riot of bright colors, Buddhas, reproductions of of Quin Dynasty terra cotta statues of war horses and soldiers, dragon wrapped jars, red-lacquered "Fu Dogs", 200 year old temple doors from rural China, lanterns and silk wall hangings. Thrown in the mix are a pair of life-sized statues of the Blues Brothers, a Chicago favorite.



**Growl:** An antique giant-sized Temple Fu Dog guards the screen in Hollywood Blvd largest auditorium.

All traces of its previous life as a General Cinema theater have been erased. "It was one of those nasty, neon-trimmed film bunkers before.

A once-plain hallway leading to the auditoriums on either side, what Bulthaup calls the boulevard, is paved with tennis

court paint, dyed black to look like asphalt with yellow and white center stripes. Actually parking meters removed from the California's Hollywood Boulevard during renovations line the walls, which are covered with more than 600 black-and-white photographs recalling the silent era of film through the Golden Age of Hollywood.

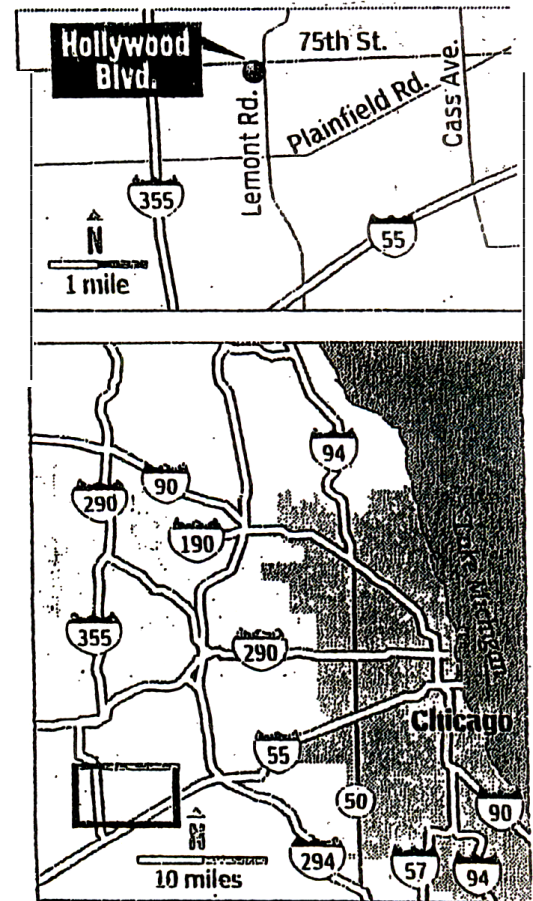
Bulthaup has given patrons something to ooh and ahh over at every turn, whether they are entertainment themed auditoriums or even the restrooms, labelled not Men or Women, but "Norman's" and "Mothers", where visitors are greeted by a photo of Janet Leigh, all done ala Hitchcock's classic film "Psycho".

"Each auditorium has its own color scheme and decorative theme because one of my pet peeves about other theaters is that each space looks identical, with all the charm of and attractiveness of an abortion clinic.

They all feature decorative setbacks—the area behind the seating and above the entry just in front of the projection booth.

## Hollywood Blvd Cinema

Restaurant Business Magazine recently named Ted Bulthaup's dinner-and-a-movie operation in Woodridge, Ill., one of the Top 10 best new concepts in the country.



The Star

Accent pieces and interior décor came from as far away as China and as near as East Washington Street in Indianapolis.

In a 450 seat auditorium (seats are black executive leather swivel chairs with countertops in front of them), Bulthaup points out two 20 ft long dragons hanging in the ceiling that had been used in the Chinese New Years parade in Los

Angeles' Chinatown, and two 200-year-old heavily-carved decorative emblem discs discovered in disrepair in a Chinese antique storeroom and now restored hanging by two 20-foot tall Palm Trees on each side of the screen.

## Order Up

Behind another set of doors, a massive kitchen can produce 1,000 meals in an hour.

Bulthaup fusses not only over the way the theaters look and the food and drinks they serve; but also over marketing.

In March 2000, the National Association of Theater Owners with the Hollywood Reporter awarded him its Showmanship Award for best marketed independent theater. The Indianapolis location's Kids

Fire Safety Program received the NATO / Hollywood Reporter Community Service Award the same year. Both locations have been named to a plethora of various "Best of" lists.

For the opening of "American Wedding" at Hollywood Blvd., he paired up with the local Fox Network and served up a "Hollywood honeymoon breakfast", complete with wedding cake made up from Krispy Kream doughnuts.

"We're always doing stuff," he said. For "Miracle" we did the opening night as the first fundraiser for the "Keith Magnuson Scholarship Fund," raising \$20,000.

Members of the Chicago Blackhawks turned out to honor the

former defenseman, who died in a car accident last year. Also in attendance were members of the original 1980 Winter Olympic's Gold Medal winning hockey team that beat the favored Soviet Union in the "Miracle on Ice".

In Indianapolis, they have upcoming fund-raisers for the Fight Against Muscular Dystrophy, Downs Syndrome and the Arthritis Foundation.

Chicago disc jockey Mancow Muller came out to the Illinois theater and filmed his welcome to 'Chicagoland's Best Movie Theater' introduction, Bulthaup said ("He's kind of the Bob & Tom equivalent for Chicago. We have Bob & Tom do it at our Indianapolis location you know."