

Flicker Palace reels, but film isn't over

By Anne Wainscott
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The theater where most young teens in Huber Heights used to see movies on a Friday night is struggling to survive the explosion of first-run movie houses such as the new Showcase Huber Heights.

Admissions at the Flicker Palace, 5589 Old Troy Pike, have dropped by half since 1984, said Barry Weaver, who operates Flicker Palace and several other sub-run theaters in the area.

"The single biggest threat that we face is the proliferation of first-run theaters. When I started into the business in 1978, there were 24 first-run theaters. I believe there are 80 right now," he said.

To combat declining business, Weaver makes it a point to talk to audiences before the evening shows at Flicker to let them know their business is appreciated. He encourages people to come back and give him feedback to improve the theater's service.

"The days of opening up the doors and waiting for people to fall in because we're so nice are gone. If we don't go out looking for business, it isn't going to come to us," Weaver said.

Sub-run theaters, like Flicker, get popular movies after they have completed their first run.

Weaver said the proliferation of screens has led first-run theaters to hold onto films longer. Sometimes sub-run theaters get movies after they are out on home video.

Weaver, one of three sub-run operators in the immediate Dayton area, also operates the

Englewood and Dabel cinemas.

The other operators are Chakeres Theaters of Springfield, which runs the Kettering and Fairborn twin theaters; and National Amusements Inc., which operates the large Showcase complexes, as well as two second-run houses, Southtown and Page Manor.

Norm Levinson, head film buyer for Chakeres, a chain of 72 theaters in Ohio and Kentucky, said its second-run houses are "doing quite well."

Repeat viewers account for a large percentage of their patrons, he said. Current movies, such as *War of the Roses*, attract those people who "will see it a second or third time." Or, he said, "For a buck-and-a-half, they'll wait for it."

Weaver said to meet the competition he is cutting his regular \$2.50 admission price during April, and has other promotions in the works, including a singles night and a birthday club, and possibly, joint promotions with neighborhood restaurants.

For most of the '80s, Flicker was a popular weekend hangout for junior high students. But Weaver said he had to respond to adults' complaints about the teen-agers.

"We ... came down a little harder on the kids, which I don't think they appreciated either. We lost a lot of kid trade as a result of that," he said.

Chakeres' Levinson said all ages love seeing a movie, maybe for the second or third time, on the big screen.

"There's still the magic of sitting around and laughing with people and enjoying it away from home."



WALLY NELSON/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Barry Weaver looks for way to fill theater