

# Returning To The Big Screen: Jerseyville Theater reopens May 7

by Melissa Meske Publications  
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**JERSEYVILLE, IL:** “Godzilla vs Kong” and “The Croods” will debut on the big screen in Jerseyville with the long-awaited reopening of The Stadium Theater on Friday, May 7.

Along with them will either be “Tom and Jerry” or “Raya,” as moviegoers return to get their fix of entertainment, favorite snacks, liquid refreshment, and endless tubs of the best popcorn in town.

Movie production, release, and distribution had all been impacted during the past year-plus as COVID-19 pandemic restrictions closed doors and dropped curtains on theaters nationwide. The struggle faced by local movie theaters to welcome moviegoers again after being shuttered for this past year-plus was heavily dependent on the larger markets retaking the stage.

“The pandemic has caused all exhibition re-openings to be slow and guarded, waiting for the openings of major markets to assure a steady release of new films,” said Steve Dougherty of Dougherty Theaters, which owns theaters in Jerseyville and Litchfield. “New York and Los Angeles markets are more relaxed now and distributors will be more willing to release films.

“It has been a struggle to survive the last 15 months,” Dougherty added. “However, I am anticipating a quick rebound and am especially encouraged by the comments from my Stadium customers. They are anxious to once again be able to buy fresh popcorn and view upcoming blockbusters on the big screens.”

And when moviegoers return to The Stadium Theater, they will enjoy a new kind of big screen experience. New laser projectors have been installed that will ensure a sharper, brighter picture.

They will also have a vital and timely restored, yet historically preserved, marquee to welcome them back inside.

“The Stadium Theater was the first recipient of the Jerseyville Commercial Building Improvement Grant program. Funds were provided for its marquee restoration project,” said Shari Albrecht, JEDC Partners in Progress executive director. “The theater was also the first business to pay into Jerseyville TIF District 1 several years ago. They are happy to be receiving some of those funds back now in the form of this grant.”

“We were one of the first TIF properties in Jerseyville to begin paying into the program when we expanded to three theaters,” Dougherty added. “We are now the first to benefit from the program, which supports preservation and expansion of businesses with the TIF district.”

“The marquee is 72 years old,” he said. “It has faded and attempts to restore it by painting the original porcelain panels have only been stopgaps. As we got into it, we discovered significant rust and needed tuckpointing. We got to it just in time to preserve this 72-year-old treasure. We hope to have it finished by our May 7 reopening. It is a work of art, though, and it needs the time to be done properly. It will look as good as it did in 1949 when complete and will last 100 years more.”

NeonWorks Inc. of East Alton is serving as general contractor on the marquee restoration project, and owner Chris Staar has Jerseyville roots. “He is personally concerned that the work is done in such a way as to preserve its original detail as closely as possible,” Dougherty noted.

The marquee’s exterior face panels are being restored to original vibrant colors that will be powder coated to eliminate future rusting and deterioration as well. Much of the neon is still in good shape, though, as it has been replaced as needed over the years.

Staar further described the restoration. “All the new replacement parts and hardware will be from pre-finished or powder-coated aluminum, stainless, or brass. Rusted out sections of the stadium letters and backer panels are being restored as well as the neon-lit accent panels across the top and bottom of the changeable copyreader board.

“Restoration and lighting conversion behind the reader board are also being done, along with replacement of the center top, nose, and bottom sections of the two-tier chase lamps and the right and left accent columns,” Staar said. “There are approximately 260 chase lamps on the top, center, and bottom two-tier raceways. These will be replaced, including new sockets, wiring, and matching color LED lamps. The chase mechanism is the original, four-contact turntable type cam-driven flash unit.”

“This has been such a rewarding and historically significant project, and I’m both proud and humbled to be a part of it,” he added.

Opening in 1949, The Stadium Theater was initially a one-screen theater. The Kerasotes Theater Company purchased it in the early 1970s and converted the balcony to a second theater. AMC Theaters acquired movie theater around 2008, according to Dougherty, closing it four years later in 2012.

Dougherty purchased The Stadium in 2013, adding a third screen in 2015 by building in an area that had been a city parking lot. “That began my contribution to the TIF district,” said Dougherty, “as my property taxes increased.”

Since 2013, new comfortable seating has been added to give moviegoers a true “stadium seating” experience. Also added were new point-of-sale and online ticketing options along with customer incentive programs. As a part of the 2015 expansion, new accessible restrooms were also constructed.

And through it all, as Dougherty pointed out, “Our prices have remained low as opposed to area competition, both in admissions and concessions.”

“It’s a great thing to have The Stadium Theater open again. The city’s Commercial Building Improvement Grant program is an important part of moving downtown forward and helping our businesses succeed,” said Jerseyville Mayor Billy Russell. “We’re excited to see the restored marquee, and we’re excited to see the theater reopen for business. The City of Jerseyville is grateful to Dougherty Theaters for their continued presence, and their continued support.”

A grand reopening ribbon cutting will be held soon, co-hosted by JEDC Partners in Progress and the Jersey County Business Association. At press time, the date was still being finalized.

The Stadium Theater is located at 117 East Pearl Street in Jerseyville. The movie hotline is (618) 498-4711. For updated information about the theater, visit [westsidecinema.com/stadium-theater](http://westsidecinema.com/stadium-theater) or follow them on Facebook.

More information regarding the Jerseyville Commercial Building Improvement Grant program can be acquired by contacting JEDC Partners in Progress Executive Director Shari Albrecht at (217) 556-8696.