

Local dancers receive Dance Camp scholarships

Scott Busse, Mandi Genord and Carlie Audiss of Laura's School of Dance were presented with Fusion Dance Camp scholarships at Applause Talent in Middleton on February 25. The dancers were chosen out of hundreds of dancers and will take classes in Chicago in July. (Photo submitted)

In Search of Crane Counters

On April 14th the International Crane Foundation is sponsoring the 37th Annual Midwest Crane Count in Marquette County. The count is used to monitor the general population trend of sandhill cranes in the upper Midwest, as well as to promote awareness of cranes and wetland conservation throughout the area. You are invited to participate!

If you are interested in taking part in an early morning experience please contact Gary Ertl, Marquette County Coordinator at 608-589-5760.

Potential volunteers are encouraged to attend an informational meeting March 30th at 6:00 p.m. The meeting will be at Montello City Hall. At the meeting participants will select survey sites and receive observation forms and instructions.

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The Montello Theater may soon be empty for good if owners Dawn and Dave Anderson who've worked to keep prices low so that families could afford popcorn and a movie can't find the \$75,000 it will take to install digital projection equipment that will soon be required to show first run and newer movies. The Tri-County Economic Development Corporation is forming a committee of interested citizens, organizations and businesses that would brainstorm how to raise the money with TREDC functioning as the 501(c)3 (non-profit) that receives donations for the project. To find out more, contact Bill Wheeler at 920-382-0963 or email him at bwheeler@tcredc.org. (Photo by Kathleen McGwin)

Change to digital projection equipment may make popcorn and a movie a thing of the past in Montello

By Kathleen McGwin

There's the dollar bag of buttered popcorn or the giant \$3 bag that comes with a refill. There's the case full of Beanie Babies[®] priced at \$2.50 and there's the admission price of just \$5. Any one of those things makes the Montello Theater that shows first-run family films special, but put them all together and what Dawn and Dave Anderson have been offering Montello and the surrounding communities is something you rarely if ever find any more in small town America—affordable family movies shown in a movie theater. Now that is threatened with the required switch to digital equipment that will result in possibly thousands of small theaters across the country unable to show movies.

When the Andersons bought the Montello Theatre in September of 2003, they had two things in mind. One was the affordability of movies and two was the availability of family movies.

"We'd stopped going to movies because of the cost," said Dawn on a recent morning. "We love movies, but we couldn't afford them anymore. So we bought the theater knowing we

wanted to make it affordable for families."

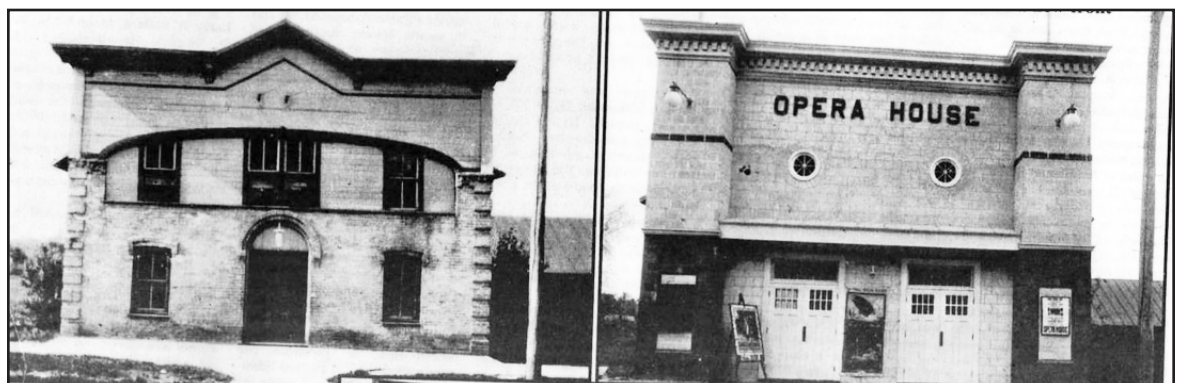
The Andersons have done just that. Except for exceptional movies like the Passion of Christ, they have shown only G, PG and PG-13 movies, have never raised popcorn prices and raised the ticket price from the unbelievably low \$3 nine years ago to the present very low \$5. They've worked with businesses and schools to hold special events and have kept movies affordable. Now they are faced with the possibility of having to close the business, one that is faced by hundreds of other small movie theaters, if they can't find a way to bring the new digital equipment to their projection room.

"Our income just pays our operating costs and upkeep, barely more," said Dawn. "We've been trying and trying to think of what we might do, but even if we keep the old equipment, new films will not be available to us and older films will get harder and harder to get. We've been told it will cost about \$75,000 for the new equipment."

In their quest to figure out options, the theater owners went to Bill Wheeler, Executive Director of the

Tri-County Economic Development Corporation (TREDC). Howard Zellmer, County Board Chair, said in a recent meeting that the theater does not qualify for options through TREDC because that money must be used to create new jobs. The theater equipment update would not do so. Wheeler is trying to help, however, by forming a committee of interested citizens, organizations and businesses that would brainstorm how the approximately \$75,000 could be raised with TREDC functioning as the 501(c)3 (non-profit) that receives donations for the project.

Movies are a part of the fabric of American culture. They're where we slip away to escape the doldrums or the stress of everyday life. Movies transport us to far away planets, distant times, or exotic places. They teach us about ourselves and about others. The Andersons know the magic of the movies and with a little magic from the community to which they've provided affordable, family entertainment, the doors may stay open for years to come. To find out more, contact Bill Wheeler at 920-382-0963 or email him at bwheeler@tcredc.org.



The building that houses the Montello Theater has been used for community entertainment since it was built sometime before 1878. First known as Dodge's Opera House, it fulfilled the citizens' need for amusement and diversion by offering traveling shows, concerts, dances, holiday parties, graduation ceremonies and more. It was remodeled in 1914 and again in more recent years. The old opera house has seen many changes, but has been used continuously for entertainment. Now owners Dawn and Dave Anderson face the possibility of having to close it because films will only be distributed in digital format starting in the near future. It will cost about \$75,000 for the new equipment. Bill Wheeler with the Tri-County Economic Development Corporation is forming a committee to brainstorm how to raise this money since the theater does not qualify for help from TREDC. Call Wheeler at 920-382-0963 or email him at bwheeler@tcredc.org.