

Is Sequel In Store For Theater?

Owner of Closed Multiplex seeks tenant

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DALLAS Have you ever knocked on the door of a house you once lived in and asked to look around? Well, what about a former place of employment?

Although it may have seemed to my friends and family that I lived at the AMC Glen Lakes in the early '90s, I only worked at the theater. If you saw movies there in 1991, 1992, or 1993, there's a good chance I tore your tickets or scooped your popcorn.

I was intrigued when I recently noticed a "For Lease" sign on the building just east of Central Expressway, and, apparently, I'm not the only one. Leasing agent Sharon Friedberg, who agreed to let me take a look around my old stomping grounds, said she shows the property once or twice a week, "It sparks a lot of interest," Friedberg said. "People have a lot of nostalgia about this place."

The 41,000-square-foot building has been vacant since May 2006, when AMC opened its 15-screen complex inside NorthPark Center. But it didn't become available for lease until last December, Friedberg said, because AMC was still paying rent until November.

I expected to be hit by a wave of memories as soon as she unlocked the door, but that didn't happen. Perhaps because the overpowering odors of nacho cheese and "butter flavoring" that wasn't butter, folks have long since dissipated.

The concession stand where I once sold such delicacies has been removed. Also gone are the eight auditoriums' seats, all of the movie screens, and the marquees that in the days before LED displays we had to change by hand from atop a ladder. Friedberg said all these features were salvaged and sold to other theaters.

Friedberg said her company, Bradford Commercial Real Estate Services, has had more than one offer to buy the facility. But she said the owner, Younan Properties, wants to lease it. The rate is \$12 per square foot, which would add up to a monthly rent of almost \$41,000.

"You're near the Park Cities. You're near Preston Hollow," Friedberg said. "You couldn't get near a wealthier part of town."

So who would want to lease such a space? Friedberg said she's had interest from churches, theatrical groups, people hoping to convert it into a discount cinema, and investors looking to open a Dave & Buster's-style entertainment venue even though there is an actual Dave & Buster's just down the street.

"You get some dreamers dropping by here," she said. She recalled showing the property to an aspiring actress who said, "My family has a lot of money, and I could lease this." I never saw her again."

I was having trouble envisioning how the Glen Lakes could be reborn as anything but a multiplex, so I drove over to what was once its biggest rival, the UA Plaza. That former theater, tucked behind all the retail on the northeast corner of Park Lane and Central, is now the home of Fellowship Bible Church Dallas. Julie Davis, the church's facilities coordinator, gave me a tour last week.

Like the AMC Glen Lakes, the UA Plaza once had eight auditoriums. Three of them have been combined into the church's main sanctuary, and a fourth is now a chapel for weddings, funerals, and overflow seating for worship services. The four theaters on the other side of the building have been chopped up into classrooms and meeting spaces.

To maximize sightlines, movie theaters' floors are not level. Because Fellowship's sanctuary started out as three theaters of different sizes, Davis said, architects had to reconcile floors sloped at three different angles.

"The most difficult thing for transforming a theater is that grade to the floor," Davis said. "It's usually concrete."

Davis said the seats in the chapel are holdovers from the facility's days as a theater. The seats in the best condition from all eight auditoriums were salvaged and put together. That means Fellowship's chapel is one of the few places where you can watch a wedding or



Staff Photo: Chris McGathey
People Newspapers managing editor Dan Koller discusses his teenage employment with Sharon Friedberg, who has been tasked with leasing the defunct AMC Glen Lakes multiplex. The concession stand manned by Koller in the early '90s has been removed since the theater closed in 2006.

funeral from a seat with a cup holder.

Downstairs, the spaces once designed to house restaurants and arcades are home to children's play areas and classrooms. The space between the elevators, which used to be occupied by the box office, is empty. On the wall above the south entrance, where moviegoers once saw banners touting the latest blockbusters, are almost 100 crosses of various sizes.

The renovation of the former UA Plaza earned a positive review in the March/April issue of *Texas Architect*. Friedberg said it's only a matter of time before the former AMC Glen Lakes experiences a similar rebirth.

"I'm excited to see something happen here," she said. "Something will happen here. There's too much interest."

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