

## Playhouse needs new popcorn popper

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Wednesday, 10 March 2010 22:31 - Last Updated Thursday, 11 March 2010 22:37

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**Group asking for donations to buy one.**

What's a movie without popcorn?

Members of the Gothenburg Community Playhouse don't want to find out.

With their 1977-model popper on the verge of breaking down, the playhouse has kicked off a challenge to raise money for a new popper to replace the old one at the Sun Theatre.

"We've been babying the old one along," said playhouse board member Matt Weiss. "One night it pumped oil all over the floor."

To buy a sleek, new popper that promises the same delicious product, Weiss said the playhouse wants to raise about \$10,000. So far, they've received \$5,000 from the local tourism committee.

Pam Buddenberg, who is spearheading the drive along with Cheri Wilson, said the new popper will be cleaner and more user friendly.

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“The oil comes in a box,” Buddenberg explained. “You don’t have to pour it into a vat like the old one.”

Movie popcorn, according to Buddenberg and Weiss, is in big demand on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights when volunteers open the Sun Theatre for shows or playhouse productions.

“We have regular popcorn customers who don’t even come to the movie,” Weiss said. “They walk by to buy a bag or buy popcorn to eat while watching a movie at home.”

Although volunteers follow a recipe when making popcorn, each one does it a little differently.

“People will stop by and ask who’s making the popcorn before they buy it,” Weiss said with a laugh.

Buddenberg pointed out that a new popper won’t change the price of a bag which is a dollar for small and \$1.50 for large.

In addition to modest concession prices, Weiss said movies at the Sun Theatre are still a deal—at \$3 for kids, \$4 for seniors and \$5 for adults—compared to out-of-town movie houses where tickets cost up to \$8 a show or more. Concessions are much more expensive as well, he said.

“That’s why we’re asking for donations, to keep prices low,” Buddenberg said.

Popcorn and movies go hand in hand, they said.

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Buddenberg related a story about popcorn when she first started dating her husband J Buddenberg. She laid down the law at the Sun Theatre.

“I told him I didn’t share my popcorn,” Buddenberg said.

The care given to Sun Theatre popcorn can be likened to something Buddenberg remembers Ernie and Ethel Van Wey offering when they owned the movie house before playhouse members bought it.

“They warmed the licorice before they sold it,” she said.

For the popcorn-popper campaign, Buddenberg challenges other home-based businesses like her own to donate to the drive.

Donations boxes are in the theatre during weekend shows.

Cash or checks, made out to the Sun Theatre, can also be sent to Buddenberg at 802 11th St., Gothenburg, NE, 69138.

Although many people like to rent movies and watch them at home, Weiss said there’s still nothing like watching one on the big screen.

“It’s unique and you have a chance to socialize,” he said.

Weiss said he hopes community members support the campaign like they have in the past in donating money for a new sound system, concession area and other things.

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“Any money we make from the shows and concessions goes back into the theatre because we’re non profit,” he said.

Playhouse members through the years have saved the theatre and kept it up.

“I hope in another 25 years, they’re doing the same thing especially when theatres in other towns have shut down,” Weiss said.

Gothenburg is the only town along I-80 between North Platte and Kearney that has an operational movie theatre.

“A lot of people have memories of the theatre,” he said. “It takes a lot of people to keep it going.”

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