



A WALK ON

A new cinema in Corvallis
continues historic tradition.

THE DARKSIDE

Story by John Ginn • Photos by Todd Cooper

A movie of Paul Turner's life could take many slants on the story: campy — *The Movie Man*, the tale of a hustling film-flam man who brings the gift of world cinema to a small town audience; frothy — *Movielat* a take-off of *Chocolat* — an independent-minded impresario who brings a delightfully delicious menu of cinematic confections to a hungry town; or it could be built around one of those overly serious "in a world" trailers — "In a world of corporate mass entertainment, only one man had the courage to take a stand against the forces of movie darkness..."

Turner himself would probably prefer that the movie be scrapped in favor of a re-release of *Cinema Paradiso*, one of his favorite films. In any case, the public can only be grateful that Turner, who masquerades as just an average Joe, uses his superpowers for good instead of evil.

Downtown Corvallis, historically a haven for moviegoers, with several theaters in operation throughout the decades, had fallen on cinematic hard times in the past few years. The State Theater was demolished and the flagship movie palace the Whiteside closed. But movie viewing in downtown is set for a revival.

Nearly 100 years after the Whiteside brothers, Samuel and George, opened their first theater in 1908, independent theater owner Paul Turner is flexing his entrepreneurial muscle by opening a new theater, the Darkside Cinema, directly across from the Whiteside on the second floor of the Book Bin building. The name is both a loving homage to the Whiteside and a good example of Turner's droll sense of humor.

Turner also owns the one-screen, 110-seat Avalon Cinema, located a few blocks away. The Darkside Cinema will add four 49-seat auditoriums to the Corvallis movie scene and bring the number of screens in downtown to the saner and more reasonable number of five.

With its close proximity to the Whiteside movie palace, the location of the Darkside might seem like a stroke of mad inspiration. Actually it's a stroke of luck. "I was at a gathering one evening and Bob [Baird, owner of the Book Bin] was there and he was talking about how he had this very large space that nobody wanted because there were no windows. We looked at each other and the lightbulbs blinked on," Turner said. "Let's see... 15,000 square feet, no windows... Hmmm. What kind of business could fit there I wonder?"

If fast forward to the Darkside lobby, March 31, 2005, the day after the party Turner threw for "all the people who gave me money." Popcorn littered the floor along with chips, a few straws and a stray carrot. Turner was sitting, sprawling really, on a vinyl chair in the lobby of the Darkside, dark hair matching the shadows beneath his eyes. He dragged himself out of the chair and flashed a grin that lit up his pale face explaining that with his ripped jeans and rumpled T-shirt, he'd made sure to dress up for the photos.

"Someone said to me at the party that the presence of the theater was like I'd given birth," he said. "I thanked him for that, but told him that it's closer to say that we're only beginning labor pains." The day before the April 1 opening, Turner still had a long to-do list.

"Fortunately, I've got some very good people working for me, and fortunately for them, I'm a hell of a boss," Turner said, smiling. For more of his slyly sharp humor, log on to the Avalon's website. It's full of Turner witticisms and irreverence. And at the Darkside, one of the first things you'll see when you enter is a sign with an arrow for "Tickets, Concessions, Sarcasm."

Mixed with the humor is the mind of a hard-nosed businessman, an independent theater owner, a very rare breed who must scabble for survival against huge corporations. Often seen around town on his purple Harley, Turner is a bike-riding, cinema-slinging, celluloid-junky rebel who draws paral-