

THE BIJOU CONNECTION

The French-themed Bijou Metro cinema to open downtown

BY ALEXANDRA NOTMAN

THE HEILIG THEATER, EUGENE'S OLDEST MOVIE HOUSE, CIRCA 1950s

Downtown Eugene: On a spring evening in 1938, Shirley Temple, Laurel and Hardy, Mae West, Ginger Rogers and the Three Stooges could be seen posing for the paparazzi under the bright lights of the Heilig Theater marquee where the Hult Center now stands. OK, they were actually local actors hired by the theater for the “Hollywood Premiere and Follies,” a show replicating the Hollywood glamour of an opening night at the Grauman’s Chinese Theater and slated by *The Register-Guard* as “one of the biggest social and theatrical events ever seen in this city.”

Over 70 years later, decades after the last downtown Eugene movie house closed, Bijou Art Cinemas is opening a second location at Willamette and Broadway with the hope of helping revitalize the city’s core through cinema and culture again. But in today’s ever-changing media landscape, it may be harder than ever to lure would-be moviegoers away from their HD flat-screen-equipped living rooms, where movies can be found for little to no cost via iTunes, Netflix or BitTorrent, and into the theater. “It’s pretty crucial that movie theaters actually offer some sort of experience,” says Ed Schiessl, who co-owns and operates Bijou Art Cinemas with Louise Thomas and Jamie Hosler. “We can’t just offer a seat to sit in for five bucks anymore.”

Opening in spring 2013, the new Bijou Metro will serve local beer, wine and a limited gourmet menu. The First National Tap House, an English-style pub, will open next door and connect directly to the theater. Outfitted with four auditoriums — two 40-seaters and two 20-seaters — the Metro will curate film series (think kung fu, old classics, ’80s action flicks), expand and tailor programming for Eugene audiences (seven-days-a-week matinees, a screen devoted to classics) and grow partnerships with the community through events like DisOrient and the UO’s Film on Film series. For now, ticket prices will remain the same as the original Bijou.

