

builds word of mouth,” says Schiessl, who works with close to 50 distributors every year, “or do we dump it and try to bring in the next movie?” There are multiple factors at play. It’s more profitable to screen movies during their national advertising campaigns because it’s, well, free advertising, but that can cause schedule conflicts. Many film distributors, like 20th Century Fox, Sony and Focus build mandates into their contracts requiring theaters to show their film a certain amount of times a day, or on a certain date or for a certain period of time. Whereas a multiplex can easily shuffle films around, the Bijou currently can barely squeeze films into its two-screen schedule.

“These are big companies and when they want something, they throw their weight around,” he says. “It’s really ultimately up to us what we play, but if we piss off Sony and we never get one of their movies again, that would break us.”

The environment has changed significantly since Lamont was at the theater’s helm, when multiplexes had yet to identify the commercial appeal of indie flicks. “He just completely had the market cornered. Where now stuff like *Moonrise Kingdom* opens at Regal and we have to wait eight weeks until we can even pick it up,” Schiessl says, sighing. “I look at the grosses from the ’80s and ’90s, and I’m just like, man, he would make as much in a weekend as we would in a month.”

But from the beginning, Lamont recognized the need to acquire more screen real estate so that films could take time to grow an audience. “He wanted it for the same reasons: so we could play films longer,” says Thomas, who managed the theater under his ownership. She laughs. “He would be jealous and mad that we’re doing it and that he didn’t get to do it. It would be exactly what he wanted to do.”

The Bijou would prefer to play more documentaries and foreign films, but in the past only 10 to 15 people would attend a screening in a theater with a capacity for 100, a gap that was not financially sustainable. Enter the new Bijou Metro. “Having a 20-seat auditorium that we can play these little niche documentaries, little foreign films, anime, kung fu — that will really expand our

‘It’s pretty crucial that movie theaters actually offer some sort of experience. We can’t just offer a seat to sit in for five bucks anymore.’

— ED SCHIESSL, BIJOU CO-OWNER AND OPERATOR





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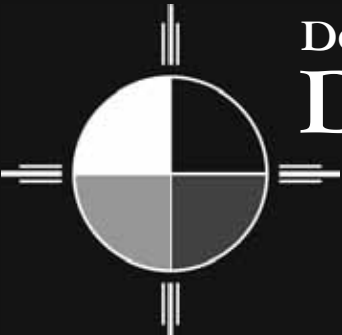
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