

Siuslaw News
P.O. Box 10
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Opinion

EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

CATHERINE J. ROURKE
 For the Siuslaw News

Michael Falter



with a giant box of Skittles. Cinema gives people permission to escape for two hours without having to check Facebook or answer the phone.

Falter took that desire for drama and nostalgia one step further with cultural programming, a lobby framed with original Marilyn Monroe photos from The Archives and refreshments like handmade chocolates, Oregon-crafted wines and quality meals from Box Lunch in addition to the classic snacks. Even the popcorn comes with a “deluxe flavor station.”

“Designed as a hybrid theater from the onset, City Lights combines commercial and art house programming,” Falter said. “It’s the best of both worlds.”

But City Lights isn’t a one-man show. Falter partnered with his wife Susan Tive, a writer specializing in grants, to make it happen. While vacationing in Florence in 2013, the couple from Washington noticed the local cinema had closed.

“We saw Florence as a town on the cusp of cultural expansion,” Falter said. “It was an inviting place that could sustain an art house theater. It was a huge risk but we felt ready to take on the challenges.”

The couple faced a bevy of them after purchasing the defunct theater in June 2014. For starters, they needed to remodel the entire facility and replace outdated equipment with \$200,000 in new digital projection gear.

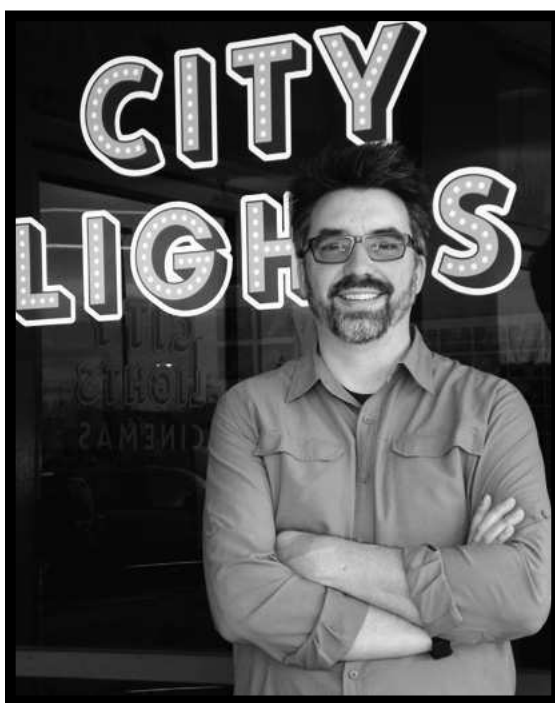


PHOTO BY CATHERINE ROURKE

Michael Falter, recipient of the 2016 Stu Johnston “Business of the Year” award for City Lights Cinemas from the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce

“It’s been an epic journey,” Falter said, explaining how it included pitching a tent in the lobby during renovations until they found a home. The doors opened in just six weeks in August 2014.

Today, four theaters project everything from blockbusters to documentaries, foreign and independent films. The Performing Arts showcases opera, ballet and Shakespeare while the Master Painter series transports viewers to exhibitions around the globe.

“It’s amazing to live here and enjoy such culture,” Falter said. “We’ve been completely embraced by the community and we’re always doing something new.”

Falter plans to bring more film classics and discussions, as well as

themed educational genres in partnership with Lane Community College. Theater 4 is available for meetings, special events and one-act plays.

“Coming from the nonprofit theater world gave us a perspective to apply to City Lights with a slightly different point of view than commercial cinema,” he said. “We saw Florence as an experiment that took advantage of the shifts in technology. Our background helped us to create a business combining nonprofit and for-profit models that can drive content viable for Florence.”

The membership program enables the theater to operate as a nonprofit. Last year it donated 1,941 tickets and free student screenings. Tive and Falter still rely on their day jobs to pull it all off. Tive works as director of philanthropy for the Salt Lake Film Society and Falter serves as program director for the Pickford Film Center, while four employees help keep the show going.

Falter is no stranger to theater. Born in Olympia, Wash., the former educator traces his fascination with film to early roots. Watching “Citizen Kane” in high school triggered his passion and the movie remains his all-time favorite.

Falter received a master’s in literature from the University of Washington and taught English at Utah State University. It was love at first sight for Tive and Falter, and the couple lived in Santa Fe where, as a film school teacher, he realized the importance of education through theater.

“I love bringing fabulous works

of art to communities through film,” he said. “It’s important to expand this to people beyond the classroom.”

Falter combined art films and community education during his 10 years as executive director for the Pickford Film Center, a nonprofit art house cinema in Bellingham. Tive joined him there as a grant writer and the couple worked together for five years on developing Art House Convergence, a national art house theater association.

Falter’s mission to resuscitate community cinemas by turning them into art houses deserves an Oscar. The Pickford Film Center and Doctober Film Festival he launched in Bellingham continue to thrive today.

“I wanted to prove that there was a viable audience for independent and art films,” he said. “We pinch ourselves every day that we live so close to so much beauty. We feel so at home here. We see Florence on the cusp of change and enjoy being part of its attractiveness.”

Tomorrow, City Lights will host its annual “And the Winner Is...” Oscar event with all the glitz of the Red Carpet projected on-screen and a portion of the proceeds benefiting Siuslaw Outreach Services. Throw on some finery or just come as you are and enjoy the party.

Popcorn, anyone?

Catherine J. Rourke is an award-winning journalist, author and book editor who teaches creative writing at the Florence Regional Arts Alliance. Email CJReditor@gmail.com.

LETTERS

PUZZLING REMARK

Newly-appointed U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos made a puzzling remark after a visit to a public middle school in Washington, D.C. She said that the teachers were in a “receive mode... waiting to be told what they have to do....”

This is exactly the kind of misguided statement that fails to recognize the professionalism of educators, while disregarding the underlying issues such as shortage of funds and overcrowded classes that prevent many children from reaching their full potential.

In 40 years as an educator, I have rarely met a teacher who was waiting to be told what to do. The many teachers in public and private schools with whom I have had the privilege to work have been professionally trained, dedicated, intelligent, hard-working and creative individuals with lots of ideas and the desire to implement them.

Within a variety of constraints including budget, class size and regulations, most teachers do a remarkable job of imagining, innovating, crafting and creating educational opportunities for children.

If Sec. DeVos truly understood educational processes, she would know that teachers are not waiting for anything... except perhaps for the support and encouragement they need to be

even more effective in their roles.

A great step forward for the teachers and children of Florence and Dunes City would have been the approval of last year’s bond measure to build a new Siuslaw High School.

For many good reasons, some of which I have seen first-hand as a substitute teacher and ASPIRE volunteer at our Florence schools, a new high school facility is badly needed. I sincerely hope that the school board plans to resurrect the bond measure at an upcoming election, and I strongly urge all residents to become familiar with the myriad reasons that this project is of great importance to our local children and the entire community.

I willingly pledge my time and energy to help ensure that this time, it receives sufficient support for passage. I hope others will do the same.

*Robert Orr
 Dunes City*

KEEPING HIS VOWS

Judith Preisler’s Letter To the Editor (Feb. 22) expresses her anger and troubled feelings about the deportation of undocumented (illegal) immigrants.

She goes on to relate a story about an illegal immigrant family while, at the same time, not miss the opportunity to marginalize President

Trump’s daughter.

The laws of our nation, which President Trump vowed to uphold as part of his swearing in process, state (in part) that illegal immigrants are to be deported. Our President did not institute this law; he is merely upholding it.

Regarding those who are affected by the law and people opposed to the law, they should use their energies to repeal or change the law rather than weep for those who are essentially law breakers.

In my opinion, demeaning our President by calling him a “boisterous television personality,” as well as demeaning his family, serves no useful purpose.

The President is simply doing what he is required to do if he is to keep the vows that he made to the American people.

*Ron Duzy
 Florence*

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor concerning issues affecting the Florence area and Lane County.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters should be limited to about 300 words and must include the writer’s full name, address and phone number for verification.

Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Libelous and anonymous letters or poetry will not be published.

All submissions become the property of Siuslaw News and will not be returned.

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