

**Theater** from 1B

your computer to your TV. There was something just deeply unsatisfying watching a film on a computer screen or even TV.”

The films needed to be on the big screen, but how to get there during a pandemic was a challenge. As of right now, only a handful of theaters in the entire state have ventured to reopen.

“I hadn’t been in the theater for weeks after the shutdown,” Falter said. “When we came in, it was just the saddest thing. Susan and I were depressed. We were like, ‘This can’t be it. This just can’t go away.’”

Falter would walk around the neighborhood, asking people they knew if they would ever come back again if the theater reopened.

“Some people said, ‘We’re ready to come back now.’ And then other people were, ‘You’ll do the right things to make it feel safe.’ So, we just decided at one point we needed to do it.”

The question was how.

Some theaters were blocking out entire rows, hoping that people would keep their distance. Others were relying on private showings.

“A lot just wanted to get the lights turned on,” Falter said. “Legally, we could have opened June 5 during Phase 2 in Lane County. But it felt like we needed to do the work — we needed to research what the best practices were.”

While taking seats out was possible, the seat anchors were more challenging to remove while keeping the theater feeling comfortable.

“I don’t have to figure out how to make tables, I just have to figure out how to make a table top. And that was huge,” Falter said.

Instead seeing the restrictions as a hindrance, he used them as a map to rework the many issues that customers have had with City Lights over the years.

“And then I started feeling like I did in 2014 when we first opened,” Falter said. “Once we started tearing out seats, you can’t stop. And you have to figure out what the next step is. It’s a combination of finding the right awesome people and an engineering solution to the problem. And then discovering that the most elegant solutions were already here.”

One of the biggest issues customers had was how uncomfortable the seats were. Either the width was too small,

or the leg room wasn’t enough.

“There’s a lot of variation in how wide the seats are, more than I even recognized,” Falter said. “They all look roughly the same size. But there’s 19-inch seats, 20-inch, 21-inch — there’s actually some pretty wide seats.”

Falter and Tive spent

only allow for a limited number of people in each movie theater per showing. Only two theaters will be open at first, and social distancing restrictions will only allow for a limited audience — 30 customers for the larger theater, 25 for the smaller theater. Families and couples will be able to sit next to

like every step of the way, it’s made it a better experience. Not just for patrons, but for us too. We’re excited to make it super easy and clean for the staff to deal with too.”

As for what movies the theater will be showing, for now it will be a mix of classics and recently released independent films. Originally, most theaters across the country had planned to open on July 10, with the expectation that Disney’s “Mulan” live-action remake and the Christopher Nolan film “Tenet” would be opening days after.

But after the virus began spiking in areas like Florida, California and Texas and cities like New York were still not allowing theaters to reopen, the blockbuster releases were moved to August. The national theater chains moved their reopening to coincide.

“For us, we felt we’ve been doing all this work and we also have a really rich selection of independent films and documentaries that we can choose from that nobody has seen yet,” Falter said. “So, they are new.”

Films include the civil rights documentary “John Lewis: Good Trouble” and the Ethan Hawke film “The Truth.”

But there will be blockbusters as well. Yesterday (July 10), the Star Wars sequel “The Empire Strikes Back” was screened.

“The following week we have ‘Beauty and the Beast,’ which was a big hit for us,” Falter said. “Warner Brothers is doing a similar thing, they have a lot of classics like ‘Casablanca’ and ‘North by Northwest.’ ‘The Hobbit.’ ‘Batman.’ ‘Citizen Kane.’ We’re going to internally pick five from the list and do a Facebook poll of films, see what kind of interest there is.”

The classics will be shown at a discount: \$4 for members, \$5 for nonmembers. “We’re trying to pass the savings on and have a little fun the first few weeks,” Falter said. “We’re also pushing private parties. It would be 25 people in your bubble. That’s \$175 flat, \$150 if you’re a member.”

At first, showings and seating will be limited.

Social distancing restrictions only allow 30 people in the larger theaters, 25 for the smaller one. Falter encourages people to buy tickets online in advance to ensure seating.

With the theater’s improvements and well-known classics being shown, Falter hopes that people will be able to find a safe place in tur-

bulent times.

“We want people to have fun and forget the fact that we’re dealing with a soul crushing, once in a century pandemic, at least while they’re here,” Falter said. “It’s just the magic of movies on the big screen.”

“That’s kind of our thing.”

**“It’s just the magic of movies on the big screen. That’s kind of our thing.”**

— Michael Falter, co-owner of City Lights

an entire day sitting in every seat in the four theaters testing to see how narrow they were.

“That’s 500 chairs,” Falter said. “I couldn’t even walk the next day. Susan said her hips were so bruised because you’d hit the cup holders on a narrow seat.”

The narrow seats were thrown out, the wider ones were kept.

The other issue was leg room.

“I felt the best thing to do with limited seat counts, in terms of state guidelines, was to get rid of every other row,” Falter said. “Nobody can sit next to you either in front of you or behind you. That was an easy choice. But once I did that, it was amazing. There was so much leg room. Not only do we have a table top, we have a foot rest,” Falter said. “The other thing is just being able to walk down to the end of an aisle without actually interrupting anybody or being in close proximity to somebody. Everything just started feeling right.”

It also helps with the viewing angle. “Somebody could actually be sitting in front of you with the hat on and you could still see the screen perfectly,” Falter said.

When they started taking out the seats, they realized that the theater needed help in cleaning.

“You had rust, you had gum. There was so much gum in here, it was unbelievable,” Falter said. “Pick up an arm rest and there’s gum. I was cleaning up the top railing — gum. So much gum.”

Floors and walls have been repainted, the floors steam cleaned, the backs of the chairs got a coat of Armor-All.

“And they won’t get dirty now because people can’t put their feet on them,” Falter said. “The theaters themselves will get sanitized between shows. We have the electrostatic mister.”

Current restrictions

one another, and they will have an entire row to themselves.

Revisions have also been made to the theater lobby. Before the shutdown, standing in line for tickets and concessions could often be confusing for people as cashiers sold both tickets and concessions. This sometimes led to a bottleneck where people who just wanted a ticket were stuck in line behind someone taking their time on what concessions to get.

“The concession counter is now much more streamlined and efficient,” Falter said. “We’re going to have one ticketing person. The rest is going to be three different concession stations six feet apart. So, if you’re buying concessions, we can still sell tickets to the next person.”

Stanchions will clearly delineate where to stand, and the lines will be separated six feet apart.

“It will be really clear. There will be a ton of signage,” Falter said.

As for concessions, the self-serve soda station will be turned around for staff to manage, and the popcorn flavor station has been removed.

“We’re still going to have popcorn flavorings, you’re just going to have to get a little packet. Or what we can apply then,” Falter said. “I don’t know how long that’s going to last, but aesthetically speaking, we’re looking at the soda turn around permanent. That, in a roundabout way, gave us some parameters on what we can do with that counter.”

The majority of tables and chairs have been removed from the lobby, allowing for more passage space. Digital posters have also been added in the lobby, and the bathrooms now have touchless faucets and dryers.

“It’s going to be more modern,” Falter said. “That’s the thing. It’s

**DMV** from 1B

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