

SIGNALING RECOVERY: CROWDS RETURN TO MANISTEE'S VOGUE THEATRE

A SYMBOL OF REBIRTH, THE FULLY RESTORED HISTORIC VOGUE THEATRE RETURNS TO BRIGHT LIGHTS AND GREAT FILM ENTERTAINMENT, SIGNALING RECOVERY FROM COVID-19

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During the depths of the Covid-19 pandemic, downtown merchants and others in the City of Manistee gathered to craft ideas to create a spark in the downtown corridor.

A symbol of rebirth for the community, the fully restored historic Vogue Theatre had gone dark. Like other businesses, it was closed due to the pandemic. The Vogue Theatre was renovated inside and out, reopening in 2013 through the largest community driven, volunteer-led initiative in the history of Manistee. It was supported with donations and grants from 740 people and organizations adding up to \$2.6 million.

"They were coming up with ways to lift community spirits," said Sarah Herberger, General Manager of the Vogue. "They went to our Board of Directors and asked them to turn on the bright lights of the marquee and covered the expense even though many were struggling. The Theatre's lights came back on and, yes, people were heartened and encouraged that the flame had been lit and that there were most certainly better days ahead."

Today, the conviction of that downtown group is coming true. Recovery is picking up, retailers and the Vogue are open, and residents and visitors are returning to the main street of this Victorian town.

Sold out films at Manistee's historic Vogue Theatre over the Memorial Day weekend bolstered feelings that recovery is near from the most devastating pandemic in a century. With Covid-19 distancing rules still in effect, there were sell outs at the Theatre for three consecutive days when people returned to the iconic theatre for the popular films "A Quiet Place – Part II" and "Dream Horse," showing at the Vogue's Pure Michigan Theatre and Oleson Family Theatre, respectively.

"Everyone we talk to wants to go to the movies," said Steve Brower who chairs the Board of

Directors of the Historic Vogue Theatre of Manistee nonprofit that oversees the Theatre. "We've had decent crowds since we opened on May 1, 2021 with movies that have not had the acclaim of the Memorial Day weekend films or those coming throughout the remainder of the year to the Vogue. These two movies, hits nationwide, brought sellout crowds three nights in a row. From our thousands of movie-goers to the foundations, businesses, organizations and individuals who raised over \$2.6 million to bring the Theatre back to life, we can be proud of the Theatre's resilience and importance as a catalyst for positive change throughout our community."

Brower said that hundreds of film goers returned under the 50 percent occupancy limitation to see the two hit movies.

"We're going to turn this corner and return with great programming to the consistently strong crowds we've had at the Vogue since the community and partners restored the Theatre seven years ago," said Brower. "We will be selling tickets with 100 percent capacity under the Governor's current plan by July 1, 2021, just in time to welcome permanent and seasonal residents and visitors to join us in a celebration of great entertainment at reasonable prices at our community theatre.

Brower said that the groundswell to return to theatres is happening nationally and that the film industry has a steady stream of blockbusters awaiting through the remainder of 2021.

"We've heard through our programming agent in Los Angeles that film makers, theatres and filmgoers are on track to generate big crowds and revenues with the lifting of COVID requirements," Brower said. "Fortunately for everyone, the premature concerns about the fate of the movie industry are dead wrong. From our rural town setting in Manistee to New York and L.A., we're seeing excitement and enthusiasm for film entertainment."

The Vogue Theatre was closed for over three months from March 13, 2020 to June 26, 2020 and closed again for five months from November 18, 2021 to May 1, 2021.

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