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Going Attractions: The Definitive Story of the American Drive-in Movie

By April Wright

-The show starts in two minutes. [Old-time instrumental music plays] [Rock music plays] -The drive-in is a holy American icon. It's actually a phenomenon. -My earliest memories of the drive-in really had nothing to do with movies. It really had to do with being at the drive-in. -They were heavily teenaged, but there were also young families. -There wasn't internet, there wasn't computers, and there wasn't the television. -The drive-in sort of came out of this car culture, this time where we were trying to do everything in a car, to be able to eat in your car, and then to be able to watch a movie from your car. And the drive-in kind of married Hollywood and cars, that post-war euphoria of optimism. -There's something about going to the drive-in. Being outside with a group of people really makes a difference than just regular moviegoing. -By 1958, there was almost 5,000 drive-ins in the country. -They are becoming harder and harder to find. You know, what happened to all the drive-ins? -They get plowed under. Something gets built over it. And after five years, people have forgotten what was there before. -Walmarts were buying the properties and whatnot. -Developers would come in, and they'd say to a drive-in owner, "I'll give you \$500,000 for your property." -If you go by there, you'll see the ghosts of the place, the way it was, and I don't even need to see a picture of it. The memories of the place are still there. -Maybe some of this really could make a difference if people looked at this and said, "Hey, what did happen?" [Old-time movie instrumental music plays] -More than 70 million people in the United States go to the movies each week to get away from their cares and to find entertainment and thrills on the magic screen. -In the '30s, which was the height of the big studio system, the moviegoing experience was like a night in the theater. Really gave the ordinary citizen the feeling that they were in a palace. Beautiful seats and a large stage that could be used for musical productions before or after the film. All through the 1930s and into the '50s, when people went out to the movies, American society was a little bit more formal, so people would dress up. When you see

pictures of audiences
in those earlier decades, they are very formally dressed. - Take me to the
drive-in
picture show When I'm with you,
that's where I want to go With the stars above,
we fell in love At the... -Richard Hollingshead Jr.
decided to put a sheet up
between some trees and bring the projector outside
and screen some movies. -My dad -- he put a Model "A"
Ford on our driveway, put a projector on the hood,
and put a screen on the tree. -He decided
to start tinkering around with different ways
of placing cars and eventually became what we consider
the ramp car system now, where cars would
pull up on a ramp. He placed several cars on blocks
to raise them -- the front of the car,
up and down. -When they first built them, they had a fixed ramp
in front of a bulkhead. You couldn't drive over it. -I believe he
originally did it
for his mother. -My grandmother Donna
is the one that started it. She was a big woman --
6 foot tall. She couldn't fit in the seat. [Laughter] -It grew
and started charging admission and eventually had to move
out of the yard and to a separate location. -The first drive-in theater
opened in Camden, New Jersey,
on June 6, 1933. -And at that time, they were charging
25 cents a carload. -The idea went over quite well. They started springing
up
around the country. The drive-ins were supposed
to be paying royalty fees to what was then known
as Park-in Theatres Corporation, though a lot of drive-ins
didn't. -Wilson Shankweiler
took four acres of land and made
Shankweiler's Auto Park, which opened in 1934. He actually paid
Hollingshead
2 cents per patron. And he had
two very loud speakers. You could wake up
the neighborhood. -I'm sure
that ultimately became a problem with people hearing the movie
who weren't watching the movie. -The Pico drive-in -- they had speakers
mounted in front of where you would
pull your car up to. -Back when drive-ins
first started, they didn't have names. Back then,
they were just "drive-in." [Mid-tempo rock music plays] -By 1942, around

the start
of World War II, there were about 100 drive-in
theaters in the country, and that stayed that way
pretty much throughout the war. -Fire. -After World War II,
the troops were coming home. The economy's up. People were buying cars
again. - Got me a new car It's a Cadillac
Coupe de Ville -World War II -- a lot of shortages
of rubber and fuel. So families didn't have
the resources, if they had a car,
to keep it running. After World War II,
all of that changed. The car became kind of a symbol
of post-war freedom. [Bluesy rock music plays] - It takes more than money
- More than money - Keep a man warm at night - Takes more than money - More
than money -After World War II,
after the belt tightening, families can be on the move
much more easily. First of all, they were moving
into newly developed suburbs. -Like so many people these days,
we live in the suburbs. -The suburbs. 1/5 of America,
over 32 million people, now live in the suburbs, and 1.25 million more
are moving in each year. -Before the expansion
of the suburbs, with all of the government
funding from the G.I. Bill, people tended to live in cities
that were often very cramped. So a lot of public investment went into the
development
of suburban life. -Now they lived in neighborhoods where kids walked to
school
or they went to the P.T.A. You know, very homogeneous,
suburban kind of situations. - Goin' to the drive-in -The drive-in
was really a family event. - Ooh, ah Goin' to the drive-in -We'd get in the
back of the car
or the back of a pickup truck. -I got to sit in the back in the seats that
fold down
into the floor. I thought that was cool. -I think a lot of it
was convenience. You could take your kids. You can put them
in their jammies. You didn't need
to get a babysitter. -My mom and dad did what I do
with my girls right now. They'd throw us in our pajamas. -Wearing pajamas
to see the movie. -You can throw some pillows
or a sleeping bag in the car. You could all be together. They fall asleep,
usually before
the second movie even starts. -Of course, we saw the Disney
movies as little kids. -A lot of times, it wouldn't be a movie
that we'd be interested in, but it was still,
"Ooh, the drive-in!" -As a little kid, you'd look up

at the huge movie screen, and it's bigger than life itself. -It was a big event to go to the drive-in. It was an important night. -Anything that catered to families was a very, very big component of the drive-in. -The playground was, like, the most important part of the drive-in experience when I was a kid. -They wanted families to come in early and to have something for the kids to do. -It would have been considered much more safe to just send kids to the playground nearby and watch the movie. -It was a family thing. They let the kids run around and play on the playground and the train rides and everything. It was fun. It was fun. -They could get anything from being, like, a park playground, which would be a simpler playground. -Merry-go-rounds, clowns, eventually go-kart tracks, bumper boats. -How we ever did it then, I'd never know, because the liability today would kill you. -The drive-ins that had miniature golf courses. There are some that had train rides and other things for kids. It makes the drive-in a whole entertainment experience. -The Algiers had a fire engine. I think the Wayne had boats. All of the drive-ins had something. -It was a circus-like atmosphere that you just didn't get at an indoor theater. -Every drive-in was, at one point, out on the outskirts. -They were out in country pastures, several miles outside of town. -Probably the absolute cheapest land possible. -A lot of the land that would have been used would have been farmland. -Our little drive-in in my hometown was out in the middle of a cow pasture, basically. You know, it wasn't paved. It was very low-tech, even by the standards of the day. -They were placed in areas that were still, at that time, somewhat rural, before the suburbs were as built out as they are now. -Eventually, when drive-ins started to sprout up all over the place, you couldn't just have everybody called the drive-in theater, 'cause then which one are you talking about? So they would start naming them after whatever road they were on. -You would have a lot of highway 39s, a route-66 drive-in, or a city that they were in. -There are a handful of, like, maybe 15 to 20 really common drive-in names. -Starlite drive-in was

probably

the most popular name. -"Sky View," "Skyline." You know, there's a whole series of "skies." -The Starlite drive-in and the Moonlight drive-in and the Stardust drive-in. -With the occasional creative names. We had a theater in Beaumont, California, called the Cherry Pass. Now, I don't know how Bengies drive-in got its name, other than it's sort of a cute-sounding '50s name. -The name of the area is Bengies -- Bengies, Maryland, at one time it was known. There's still remnants of Bengies, Maryland. -When they opened, it was rural, and you'd be going down highway 32 and drive for half an hour, and so it would be a little adventure to go out into this rural area and have a gigantic, drive-in movie theater. [Old-time movie instrumental music plays] - Drive-in movie Sure sounds groovy Take me to a... -Originally, drive-in-movie-theater screens were wood. -Wood frame. The screen is actually a corrugated metal. -They attach a facing that is galvanized steel. -Painted with a reflective paint. -The most complex mechanism of building a drive-in screen is actually building the support. -The screen tower -- a lot of the early ones were made of wood, constructed on the ground, usually, and then raised into place with cranes. -It's a structure. It is actually a little house with a screen on the front of it. -It slants down in the front and has a storage room that we keep all of our supplies in. -Wooden towers didn't handle the winds too well. - ...Movie Sure sounds groovy -Subject to termites, gets blown down in big wind storms. And at this point, all of our screens have now been replaced and are corrugated metal. -Some of the early drive-ins were constructed with concrete blocks. Withstood the test of time, for sure. -The standard aspect ratio

was 1:

what 35-millimeter film is. -So it was almost like a square. -I worked the projection, the old-school way. Carbon arc projectors, 20-minute reels. -And it was truly an art form, running the projectors with the carbon arc. The carbons actually created a flame. It was very hot, very dangerous. The flame reflected the light

through a reflector and then out through the lens. -You just have to have two projectors. You'd have your first reel on one projector and your second reel on the next projector. -Film reels were 20 minutes, and that is because of the length of the carbon. You would have five to six reels of film to make up one feature. At the end of every reel, in the upper right-hand corner, there's what they call changeover cues, and they basically go unnoticeable, unless to the trained eye. On the second cue, you would actually do the changeover with a foot pedal and an electric shutter that simultaneously opened the shutter on the machine you were going to start and close the one that was running. -And that movie would come back on. People wouldn't even know it happened. -Of course, everyone remembers the old speaker boxes that used to hang on the car windows. -That's one thing that is, you know, a great icon of the drive-in, is the drive-in theater speaker that you hang on your window, and you don't drive away while you're still connected. -In the ground, they were laying this wire that coming up the poles that carried the speakers. So you had all of that as a component of construction. -And they put little down lights so that you could see the poles. -The sound was confined through the theater area. It just revolutionized sound back then. A lot of drive-ins didn't pay royalty fees. The ensuing court battle proved futile. They started springing up around the country. - There's a great drive-in 'bout a mile out of town Gonna be there with my baby when the sun goes down One for the money, two for the show We're hoppin' in my hot rod to go, go, go, go Drivin' at the drive-in The hippies keep a-ridin' Feelin' good and groovin', groovy like a movie Drivin' at the drive-in tonight -Late 1940s, early 1950s, the big thing of the time was to go into the drive-in movie business. -Can't forget the marquee. That's definitely a lot of drive-ins' claim to fame. [Oldies music plays] -It was hugely popular in the 1950s. Marquees were made mostly of neon. [Music continues] As a second marquee, the back of the screen tower sometimes would have

moving artwork in neon. Something that would attract your attention. - I feel all right Gonna go some more next Saturday night Drivin' at the drive-in -Another aspect to that is the murals. A lot of them had murals on the back, a lot of neon. -As you're driving by, all of a sudden, boom. "Ooh, look at that colorful neon, you know, and it moves." And each drive-in would try to outdo the other drive-in. [Oldies music continues] -They had beautiful neon structures. Absolutely amazing. You know, wagon wheels turning, like, old-west pioneer scenes. You know, there was one with the Spanish flamenco dancers going like this. - Drive-in tonight Drivin' at the drive-in Drivin' at the drive-in -Indoor theater is two hours on a Friday or Saturday night. The drive-in is what you do. It's a commitment. You're gonna be there all night long. -You never felt like you were completely isolated, but you didn't feel like in a regular movie theater, where everyone could see what you were doing. You had that aspect of privacy that was always a really nice feature of the drive-in. -But then you also had the larger experience of being out of your car and almost part of this -- you know, for two hours, this is your neighborhood. -You can have a meal at a drive-in theater. They showed two movies. People will be there for a long period of time. Between films, you have an intermission, so people can go to the snack bar. That's the source of most of their income. -A lot of people don't realize that that's the business of the drive-in, is actually the food and the atmosphere and the experience, and not the tickets. -Drive-in theaters probably would not have survived if was not for the concession stand. -Soon as the credits hit the screen, we turn the lights on, and that lights the way for people to get to the snack bar. -That's where the lifeblood of the place really is, is the people going to the snack bar. -We figured, if we're gonna have them there as a captive audience, we've got to provide not only food but good food. -Most drive-ins have hot dogs, french fries. -Pizza, pizza! Everybody loves pizza. -Shrimp dinners,

chicken dinners, barbecue sandwiches. -Soda -- pepsi, sprite, orange, root beer, and grape. -Some sort of ice cream. -Grilled cheese, barbecued beef, all the way up to the chilly dilly pickle. -Chocolate-covered dill pickles. -They're very, very happy to run a trailer up on the screen to help entice the audience to go buy refreshments. -Hurry, hurry, hurry. Step right over to our refreshment center for the most extravagant array of refreshment goodies ever assembled under one roof. -Intermission became the time to sell your popcorn, your candy, your pizza, whatever. [Spanish music plays] -The countdown clock, which counts down the intermission time, so you know how much time you have to get your food and get back to your car and not miss any of the movie. -This camera behind me is an Oxberry master animation camera, which we have since computerized, and we have shot many, many drive-in trailers -- the "Let's All Go to the Lobby," the famous dancing hot-dog trailer -- on this camera. - Let's all go to the lobby Let's all go to the lobby -Whenever you see a drive-in clip in a movie or whatever that everybody has, that's the most popular. - Sandy ["Alone at a Drive-in Movie" plays] In "Grease," in particular, it's actually shown on a 35-millimeter projector during the live production. -Oh, Sandy. -Motion-picture film production came down in cost, and it was more advantageous to actually shoot 35-millimeter in black and white. -And the luscious treasure of your favorite ice cream as you like it. -And then eventually it led to color in the '50s. -They're kind of quirky, kitschy. -Cigarettes. Get the kind you prefer, and enjoy them thoroughly. -And a lot of drive-ins still show them. - Let's all go to the lobby To get ourselves a treat -The Remco Movieland drive-in theatre is straight ahead! It looks terrific, Timmy. -Drive right in and park. Turn the film knob, and see six exciting film features. -This Remco Movieland drive-in theatre has everything! Its own giant screen... -Projection booth... -Marquee that changes... -Ticket window... -And six beautiful cars. -Remember, every boy wants a Remco toy. -And so do girls. -People just started to love the idea of going to a drive-in. -There was only a few shows

in town, literally. - ...Out of sight Ooh, ah We're goin' to the drive-in
Ooh, ah Goin' to the drive-in You're cruisin'
for a bruisin' Even tryin' to sneak in That old man Jenkins
sure gets under my skin [Singing indistinctly] Call the cops,
have them throw away the key Ooh, ah Goin' to the drive-in Ooh, ah We're
goin' to the drive-in [Guitar solo] -Once they knew they could draw
off of large populations, drive-ins got bigger and bigger. - At the end of
the night,
we get a starry streak We all watched the movie,
and we thought it was great The movie was a thriller,
yeah, a really good fright... -The 41 Twin in Milwaukee was one of the
largest drive-ins
in the country. It held about 2,000 cars. It was quite rare. A double
screen, and you could actually drive
right through the screen tower. -Maybe it's just something about car
culture
in the U.S. and Hollywood, and these things kind of jelled, and it was just
a very American thing. There are a couple spots around
the globe that have drive-ins, but it just wasn't
quite the same car culture in other countries. - Ooh, ah Goin' to the
drive-in -Once they started
springing up everywhere, it got to the point
where a lot of drive-in theaters were competing
against each other. Sometimes they were
only separated by a few miles. -The Wilkes-Barre/Scranton
area -- at one time,
there was about seven drive-ins within a 10-mile radius. -The Milwaukee area
had
the 15 Outdoor, the 59 Outdoor, the Franko 100,
the 41 Twin, the Starlite drive-in. -Within driving distance
at one time, there had to be
12 or 15 drive-ins, and they were all successful. It wasn't just one or
two.
They were all successful. -By 1958, there was almost
5,000 drive-ins in the country. [Mid-tempo music plays] - Would you like
to go out with me? There's a movie
that I'm dying to see It's a sensation
that's sweeping the nation It's gonna be bigger
than a radio station Put a speaker
onto the driver's window That's the way
we will hear the show Have you ever heard
of such a crazy thing? Watching a movie
at a drive-in show Come with me,
and I'll take you there We'll have more fun

than at the old state fair We don't even need
to drive too far And when we get there,
we'll just stay in the car [Instrumental solo] -Another aspect of
drive-ins
that never really took off was the autoscope drive-in. It was basically a
central concession stand
with a projection room, and it would beam the movie up
into a series of mirrors, and it would reflect off
to individual screens that were usually like 3'x5'. And you'd actually pull
your car up in front of it. It was almost like pulling up
in front of a mini TV screen. Wisconsin had one
autoscope drive-in up in Marinette. It wasn't around very long. Trying to
show
a movie in the fog with that kind of a theater -- they said it basically
looked
like a giant U.F.O. had landed. -People just aren't
really used to the idea of how much traffic and how much noise
the drive-in actually generates. -People backed up for miles
in both directions, trying to get
into a 300-car drive-in. -My parents had
a big Pontiac Grand Ville, and it had a large trunk. -Sneaking into a
drive-in
is almost a rite of passage. -We would go
up to the Baptist church, and we would throw the folks
in the back of the trunk. -We were the ones that invented
sneaking them into the trunk. These kids think
they just figured that out. -A lot of people
do sneak in the trunk. To this day, they still do it. -Of course that's not
true, but people invented it
way before us, but we thought we invented it. -And I always asked, what was
the first movie
playing? And that was a clue to the folks
in the back of the trunk to be quiet. -And the car is like this. You know,
it was like at an angle. -And we did this for years
and never got caught. -As much as
you're not supposed to do it, it's makes for great memories. -Hey! Look
out! I feel like a meatball in here.
Whew! -Okay, let's go find the chicks. -The 1950s were very popular
for buck nights. All your car could hold
for a dollar. And some people could jam 10, 15
people in a car if they could. -A lot of drive-ins used it more
as more of a promotional tool or for special events. - At the drive-in
-That was the one time you could probably get away with
putting somebody in your trunk. -Most of the studios owned

their own exhibition arm, so there was a Warner theater chain, the Paramount theaters. - We got the money, and you got the money Honey, you got the money -The film companies -- I think they catered to the indoors. -Film companies didn't want to give drive-in theaters first-run prints. -It was really hard for the drive-in theater to get a first-run. -Beginning in 1940, there was a lawsuit that went through the courts in which they were trying to break up this studio stranglehold on exhibition. And by 1948, that happened. And that is known as the Consent Decree. -In those days, you had first, second, and third run, so we played all the way down the list in both drive-ins and hardtops. -The '70s and '80s, second run, we didn't play any movie until it was 14, sometimes 20 weeks old. -Advertisement in a lot of newspapers -- "Now at popular prices." That means you no longer have to spend the 2 bucks to go to see the film at a nice theater. You could see it in your local neighborhood theater or in the drive-ins. -That was before video, before VCRs. In the '70s, you could play them. In the Lehigh Valley area, "The Sound of Music" played at the Boyd theater for 52 weeks. You're not gonna see that anymore, because it's just overkill. -This was your chance to see this movie, and if it went away, it went way. -Another problem they had was daylight savings time. -Once they started doing daylight savings, it really affected the time window that drive-ins had for their business. -Daylight savings means my staff goes home at all hours of the morning. -Too late at night for people to come for dinner, so that really took a bite out of the concession sales. -They couldn't show movies

until 9:

to go to work the next day. Kids had to go to school. They couldn't be out that late. -Staying for the second movie isn't nearly as appealing if you get out

at 2:

as good of a family outing. -The drive-ins were really fighting against daylight savings time. And when it finally became national in 1967, well, there's another thing

that affected attendance. -It has no meaning anymore.
It just shouldn't exist. Now, it is not because
I love drive-ins. I am in a wonderful position. My theater was built
by Jack Vogel. The back of the screen
faces west. The front faces east. I can get on a screen at 8:45. You tell
that
to poor Deb Sherman in Ohio, who's waiting till 10:00 before she can start
her first movie. -If I could have it my way,
I would say, "Oh, yeah,
forget daylight savings time. You know, it gets late enough
as it is, and it's just fine." -There's a drive-in movie. Let's get these
people. -Another thing that drive-ins
always had to deal with was mosquitoes. -Bugs can be
a little horrendous, but, you know, we deal with it. -We do have bug
zappers, and we do offer
free insect repellent. -The 1940s and '50s,
they would go around fogging drive-in theaters
with insecticides to try to eliminate that problem
to keep people happy. Usually DDT,
I believe, it was called. It was later banned
for causing cancer. -They would sell
this thing that you would light, and it would give off an odor that would
keep
the mosquitoes away, and all the drive-ins
would sell it. -A pleasant aroma for you... But not for mosquitoes. -[
Groaning]
We've had it! -Pic is on sale
at the refreshment stand now. -You know,
it all depends on the weather. If the weather's right
and the movies are right, we're going to be busy. [Thunder crashes] -You
can have a big plan, and the weather
can take it all out. -And there was
a drive-in theater down below Lewistown, P.A.,
called the Midway drive-in. It was under
about 12 feet of water. -Depending on heavy snows
or hurricanes or five or six inches of rain,
we will get flooded, and we do get flooded. -Winds blowing over screens.
We've had a lot of drive-in
damage due to hurricanes. [Rock music plays] -In 1955,
Hurricane Diane comes through. It actually came up the Gulf, and then came
up
along the Mississippi River, blew over
the original projection room, blew over the shadowbox screen,
the box office, and the two outhouses. -The screen blew down

in 1981 in a storm. It looked like somebody just tore it in half and left the right side of it on the ground. -Hurricane Agnes just took down a quarter of the Bengies screen. -There was a hurricane coming up the coast, and we were trying to get the show in before the rain started. As we get into the part where the tornado actually hits the drive-in theater in the movie, there's lightning on either side of the screen, and it just lit up the skies all over the place, and you could never get those special effects in an indoor theater. -There are people that are gonna go to the drive-in no matter what. -I used to go constantly in the rain. -There are people that are gonna go in the winter. If it's 20 degrees and the snow's blowing, I got to wonder, why are you here? I'm glad you are, but I really have to wonder sometimes. -About halfway through the first movie, it started to snow. We had to go get a car heater. -Almost all the drive-ins were wired for heaters. -We plugged this heater in at the base of the speaker pole, tried not to set the place on fire, because we've got blankets draped in front of it, and we sat there in a snow storm watching three "Dirty Harry" movies, and we were just laughing because everybody in the world would have thought we were nuts, but we just loved it. -One problem for drive-ins in the northern climates -- very short seasons. A lot of times, it will be Memorial Day to Labor Day, weekends only after that. -Theaters would shut down in the winter. We have one left in Utah called the Redwood, and it shuts down between October and March. -Our season usually runs from the end of March, first week in April, to, like, the last week in October. -I mean, it's basically really cold and snow and ice. It's just dangerous. -Even though you're closed, you're still going out there, checking on the place, working on different things and getting everything prepared for next year. [Mid-tempo music plays] -Probably if there hadn't been World War II, television would have been a much more major force earlier than it was. You see in the United States, starting around '49 and '50, where television explodes

onto the scene, and this really affected the motion-picture industry, because people who were buying televisions, and many of them were families -- you know, the sort of post-war family. -One of the big things with early television was they really were aiming for family entertainment. They really were targeting a mass audience. -They would stay home, and they would watch their entertainment on television. Gradually, there was more and more programming. You get Milton Berle and Lucille Ball and hundreds, really, of programs, that we're familiar with from the early '50s. [Mid-tempo music plays] -It was another form of competition that drive-ins had to deal with. -Filmmakers had to compete with something that people could watch for free and in the luxury of their own home. -You have a huge increase in color movies. By the end of 1950, there were about 1,000 color films. But by the time you get to 1960, almost half of the films were in color. You also see the rise in the wide screen. Starting in '53, you have cinemascope, as opposed to the 1:33 format that had been used before. And stereophonic sound comes in. So you have a different experience than people can get at home. It did cause a lot of anxiety amongst theater owners, because they had to rebuild their theater. -It was such a wide picture. They didn't want to tear down the entire screen, so they would just build on the edges of the screens to make them wider, to be able to show cinemascope movies. They had to have what we call "wings" added to the screens. -With older screens, you might be able to see the original, almost square size of the screen and additions on the sides. -It was a new experience that was to drag people away from their living rooms and into a theater so you get an entertainment that you could not reproduce at home. But now people are buying that format for their televisions. So something that started out as a novelty is now the standard. -The Cinerama, when it first came out, when you use three projectors on a curved screen. Of course, it was something big. -It not only was a wide screen, but it actually had

a three-part screen in which three different projectors are giving you an image to make it sort of pop out and be almost like a round viewing experience. [Mid-tempo music plays] I think the first one was "This is Cinerama," in which it starts out with a roller coaster, and you really felt like you were on the roller coaster. So it gave you a sensory experience, which, I guess now, you could say is similar to the IMAX experience. [Rock music plays] -The family slowly started to not come to the drive-in, and it became more of a teenage hangout. -The concept of a teenager really started right around that time. We tend to think of the teen years as hormones and biological changes, but the reality is, teenagers are really a market segment. We had a major economic boom. So for the first time, most teenagers didn't have to spend a lot of their free time working. And so a teen culture kind of emerged that had its own separate and distinct popular culture. -Once the teenagers found their newfound freedom of being able to drive and own their own automobiles, the drive-in was the place to go. -Teenagers now were beginning to have cars. They had more expendable income. -Here we have a whole generation of people that all of a sudden, their main pursuit is fun. -As a teenager, myself and my friends, we went to the drive-in. That was a ritual. -In my early teens, I certainly wouldn't go with my parents. I mean, that would be like, "oh," you know, "God forbid." -I wasn't old enough to drive yet, so I'd get my mom to drop me off with the car. -People just got their licenses and borrowed a car and went to the drive-in. -They could meet their friends, see the movies that they liked to see, and not have to worry about adults bugging them. -They might not have had many other public spaces to congregate. -I'd go two or three times a week, and it could have been the worst movie there was, and it frequently was back then. [Woman screaming] -Barb and I were dating. We actually fell in love at a drive-in theater, and I knew she was the one. - Stars above We fell in

love At the picture show -I talk to a lot of baby boomers, and, you know, wink, wink, but their memory may not be of the movie that they were seeing. - One kiss that would last forever -You have the environment of being in your car, where it can be private and romantic or whatever. -About halfway through the show, I asked her, "Do you want to get in the backseat?" She said, "No, I'll stay up here with you." [Chuckles] -Teenagers found out it was private. That they didn't have to worry about cops or anything else. -The image of the kids making out in the car -- that was certainly a popular conception, whether it was true or not. -Drive-ins had the reputation of being passion pits. That may have been true, but only to a slight degree. Most people were there to see the film. -A lot of the movies were targeted specifically to teens. -The teenage films -- they're a little bit campy -- really started in the '50s. [Rock music plays] -I don't know if I'd use the word "teen," but I would say I was conscious that my films were seen primarily by a youth audience. -A lot of times, they would be on a double bill that was very popular in the '50s. Two low-budget movies at the same time, many of them black and white. -A movie company called American International Pictures really catered to drive-in theaters and the teenage audience. -I worked with American International probably more than any other company until 1970, when I started my own company -- New World. -Drive-in theaters of the '60s and the '70s were showing A.I.P. movies, which were not considered in regular movie houses to be the best movies. -They are the ones that pretty much made all the movies that we remember -- "Night of the Blood Beast" and "Dragstrip Girl" and "Hot Rod Gang" and all these movies. The kids loved it. -You also have things like the beach movies that start, you know, maybe in the early '60s -- the surfing movies. You know, Sandra Dee and Annette Funicello, "Beach Blanket Bingo," those kind of things. -They were considered "B" movies, pretty much. Any type of franchise like that would play out really well at the drive-in. Of course, Elvis movies

were always really good. Another favorite, believe it or not, was the Batman movie from 1967. -That was really the only outlet for those kind of films, in these sort of lesser movie theaters or in the drive-ins. Some of the producers and directors who later became very prominent in the '60s and '70s, like Roger Corman, for example, who would make very low-budget, quick-production films and release them really quickly. -It's been said I made the first biker film with "The Wild Angels," and actually it's true. It's the first film about the Hells Angels. The film actually ended up being the only American entry that year at the Venice film Festival, and it was the opening-night film. -The next big wave of horror films was monster movies throughout the '50s and '60s. And they would use a lot of actors, some of whom later became famous, like Jack Nicholson. And a lot of very popular directors started in these low-budget, Roger Corman features. -I financed the first films of a number of directors. I was convinced that they were good. Most of them had worked with me as an assistant. I think the only one who hadn't worked with me previously was Marty scorsese. Francis Coppola was my assistant. Jonathan Demme. Ron Howard had starred in a picture for me and went on to direct. Jim Cameron had been head of special effects. -The filmmakers who are considered the greats of the last 30 or 40 years started in this kind of low-budget fare, much of which went to drive-ins. [Suspenseful music plays] -The age of Bobby socks and ice-cream sodas is gone. These people no longer feel constrained by the social rules of the past. [Rock music plays] -The '60s -- changed completely around. -This generation that had all this leisure time was also a generation that was increasingly feared. -The movie-viewing experience really changed in the '60s, and I don't think it was just confined to movies. -I think, in general, it affected pop culture. The way you felt about the establishment really changed. -Yeah. "Don't trust anybody over 30." There was a lot of unrest. Racial riots going on. You had -- in '63, you had

the Kennedy assassination. You had his brother killed. You had Martin Luther King shot. -It was a very confusing time. -Yeah. -Our world was pretty much... -It was turned upside down. -...over. Well, how we grew up, you know, in the '50s, and that was so different. -One of the things was that's when the drug culture started coming out. -And it made a change. You know, the type of people that went to drive-in movies. -Yeah. -The first drive-in movie that I really remember is "Midnight Cowboy." It was me and my best little girlfriend, and we were 11 years old. And my father -- he said, "Be sure to go to sleep. I want you to go to sleep in the back of the station wagon." We're like, "okay," you know? And he left, and we watched "Midnight Cowboy," and it was a big thing, because it was an "X"-rated movie at the time. -You couldn't even call it a hard "R." If you watch it today by today's standards, it's almost laughable. -Filmmakers were really chaffing up the censorship powers that be in Hollywood before about 1965. If films didn't have a purity seal, mainstream theaters would not show them. -By the mid-to-late 1960s, the hays code was replaced by a ratings system. -"G" means "Suggested for general audiences." "M" -- "Suggested for mature audiences." "R" -- "Restricted. "Persons under 16 not admitted unless accompanied by parent or adult guardian." "X" -- "Persons under 16 will not be admitted." -There was movies played. One was called "Blow-Up" and "Taxi Driver." They're the type of movies that made you think. -It was part of the youth counterculture rebellion of the '60s which spilled over into mass entertainment in the '70s. -People become disillusioned, so you see this reflected in film. -It's true that in the early '70s. Films began to become a little edgier. They were more violent. They were using rougher language. Nudity was starting to come into it. -You see an increase in more adult subjects. -You started to see a lot of the topical issues involving drugs. "The Trip," which was about LSD -- Peter Fonda, Bruce Dern, Dennis Hopper. Jack Nicholson wrote the screenplay. -Definitely in the early '70s, you see an increase in more graphic violence. "Targets," the first film which Peter Bogdanovich

directed, was shot at a drive-in. And while the horror film was showing, there would be a sniper at the top of the drive-in shooting the audience. It was a very good film. It got wonderful reviews and really launched Peter's career. -We started to see significant changes in sexual content. -More nudity. -Russ Meyer's "Supervixens," I mean, "The Pom Pom Girls," which somebody changed the title to "The Mop Pop Girls" on the marquee. -More explicit representations of sex, sex outside of marriage. -"Wicked Stewardesses," or whatever. "The Housewives," "The Women in Jail." -You had a lot of exploitation movies. You had all these weird kind of things coming out. -You also get a lot of the blaxploitation-type movies. You see a lot of them for several years in the '70s. So these were kind of a -- some were more high-budget than others, but those were the kind of films that you could see in a drive-in. A lot of the sort of campy or cheesy horror/mystery/thriller-type movies. "Let's Scare Jessica to Death," or these kind of films in which people are watching -- they're very tense, and all of a sudden [gasps] You know, you could do that in a drive-in very, very well. You also have this huge number of the sort of slasher kind of movies. Really horror, grade "Z", cheesy kind of movies. -There was one movie -- it was "Vanishing Point." This was the last chase-car movie. -These kind of films are kind of a natural fit with drive-ins and the younger generation. -"Enter the Dragon" -- really great on the drive-in screen. -Audiences enjoyed them. They were not going to be watching "Ben Hur," but nobody was expecting them to be that. -While it's interesting from a historical point of view, and if you're a film lover, certainly that's part of a filmography. For business -- it was not that great for business. -Once it got into the '70s, it started really shifting onto the soft-porn movies. You know, sex on the screen. -A lot of drive-ins got forced into running "X"-rated, which was part of their downfall, and they did this because they couldn't get halfway-decent movies. -It might be related

to the growth of pornography as more mainstream,
which happened in the 1970s. -And that really irritated
communities that lived
around drive-in theaters. -They didn't want
the wild teenagers and the loud music
and the 50-foot naked women and the whole thing that everybody associated
with drive-ins. -I think it did tend to show
more risqu kinds of films. -But they did what they had
to survive as a business. -And so that is one
of the reasons that community members
might be very skeptical about what kind of behavior
goes on at drive-in movies, because it does lend itself
to less-desirable behaviors, especially if the movies
are pretty edgy. -And the kids would be able
to look out the back window and see someone
having sex on the screen -- you know, 50-feet high. That would usually get
the church groups going. The councils would start
trying to pass ordinances. The 1970s were really big for trying to shut
down
drive-ins that way. -I would want no part of it,
and I would hope that anybody
that owned a drive-in would want no part of it. I don't care how bad
financial things got. -In a different sense,
those kind of movies, though, are what kept drive-ins going
in the '70s. -Drive-ins would want
to disassociate themselves with that image, and they'd rather forget
going through that time. -We went to the supreme court. The news was all
over
the country -- front page, big and all. And the local paper put one
column about an inch and a half, telling that we won our case
at the supreme court. -It seemed to be a last resort to nearly all the
drive-ins
that were going down. And they would try
the triple-X's, and then, all of a sudden,
they would be dark. -It led to a lot
of the drive-in theaters developing a bad reputation. It led to a lot of
drive-in
theaters becoming decrepit. -The use of neon
really took off in the '50s, but the problem with neon was
it's very expensive to keep up. You know, if it breaks, you got
to call a guy to come out. -A lot of them
were not installed properly on a wood structure
and burned down. Insurance companies started telling drive-in theater
operators, "We're not going to insure

your screens because you carry neon on them." City ordinances came into being, and they were saying, "We don't want you using this on your sign." -And as the years went on, theater owners just neglected to fix the signs. -The ones that remained were simpler signs. -And slowly the drive-in got that rugged look. -Why would they drive in to a drive-in that's enclosed with all weeds and trees growing and everything else? -So you're constantly having somebody on the field checking this stuff. -It not only applies to the marquee and certain aspects of the screen but also the speakers, as well. -They would get broken. The wiring in the ground would go bad, and then you'd have to dig up all the asphalt and try to locate it and try to fix it. It's just really becoming a nightmare. -Every Saturday, without fail, we'd walk up and down the rows and make sure the speakers worked. And the ones that didn't, you would drop on the ground. -And if you have 3,000 speakers, that's a lot of checking. -There was always vandalism or mistakes of people driving off with that speaker still attached. -They're out there in the snow and the wind. The cones on the inside, if you don't keep up on them, will get tinny. People throw them out of the car, and switches break, and cases break, and it's a lot of work. -Mr. Insurance won't let us have a playground. Well, he would, for the right price. -Because of insurance reasons, drive-ins had to get rid of playgrounds. -A lot of theaters have shied away from it now. There's liability issues in a lot of places. -Some drive-in theaters -- they got built up in areas that weren't so nice. -Many of them, if we would go back to the sites now, would be much more urban in their location than they would have been 50,60 years go. -Gang problems. Got to the point where that's all that showed up at the drive-in was gangs. -It's really not a place you take your family. -The other thing that drives me wild is property damage. You know, graffiti is a funny thing. Buddy,

go buy a little piece of land, build a wall, and paint whatever you want on it, okay? -Fights would break out, and the police were constantly getting called to drive-ins. They weren't making money. They'd just close and walk away. [Slow piano music plays] [Rock music plays] -The reality of both parents working or a lot of divorces or whatever it was changed that nuclear family. -Family times that we associate with the 1950s -- for the 1970s, those same families weren't experiencing a lot of the same kind of stability. -You do see a rise in films about people who are just divorced, like "Starting Over" or "Kramer vs. Kramer." "An Unmarried Woman." It became a reflection of the way society was. -And if you couple that with the energy crisis and the gas shortage... -The gas crisis not only involved a high price of gas, but it involved long lines. It involved rationing. -With 9 out of 10 stations closed this weekend, traffic on southland freeways was far lighter than usual. -If your license plate had odd numbers, you had to go get gas on certain days. It was even certain days. So people were not gonna drive for entertainment. It was more important for them to go to work, to go food shopping for their family, and it was tough. -And a big switch from huge cars to little, tiny, gas-efficient cars. -The gremlins, the pintos. -Cars become smaller and more compact. And smaller cars make it less enjoyable to sit in them for a few hours and watch a movie. We weren't as obsessed with being in our car all the time. -Another interesting thing that happened was the advent of the bucket seat with the high back and also the bench seat with the headrests on them. -Oh, bucket seats, yeah. Bucket seats. -Because now people couldn't sit in the backseat and see the screen. -That definitely contributed to the demise of the drive-in. There is no question. Because you no longer had the big cars, and the price of gas was up. -There were nights that it was not worthwhile to be open. -People's thinking was different. The whole thing was different. [Church choir singing indistinctly] -One way they could get into the good graces of the community were to offer their properties up for church services on Sundays. -Let us rejoice and be

glad. -In Wisconsin,
the Beaumont drive-in did it. The 41 Twin did it.
The Stardust in Eau Claire. St. Croix Hilltop
in Houlton, Wisconsin, are still doing it even though the theater's
been closed since 1992. The drive-in's still standing, and they actually
have
a funny thing they do -- a song. It's "If you're happy and
you know it, clap your hands." Well, they do "If you're happy
and you know it, honk your horn,
blink your lights," and something else. Or, "wipe your wipers,"
I think it is. It's pretty funny. -The fact that the drive-ins
were only operational for four or five hours
every night meant that there was
this huge plot of land that was sitting, you know,
just doing nothing all day long. -Flea markets
is another really common way that the land can be used
during the day. -A lot of drive-ins on Sundays,
they, you know, fill up the lot with people selling antiques
and whatever. -The United States
is a little bit odd in the sense that they don't
have it as much
as other countries have it, and it is a viable alternative to shopping at,
you know,
Walmart or Target. It's cheaper,
there's more variety, and you're outdoors, and there are all these elements
that make it really
a pleasant experience. -In some places,
it didn't go over so well. The skyway drive-in up in door
county tried for a short time. Just didn't go over. A lot of times,
we're just depending on how much of the surrounding
community you had to draw on. -They take about 10 years
to get off the ground, and once you get
to the 10-year mark, it's a really big,
thriving marketplace. It just establishes itself, and then it keeps growing
from there. -Actually, it has kept us going. In fact, the last 20 years,
it's helped me
to subsidize development. -It's sustaining us
in hard times. To sustain us economically,
the thing is the swap meet. -We are running the typical
theater projection system. The single projector
with the platter system. -This is the lamp house. It provides the light to
put
the picture on the screen with. -Most indoor theaters will use maybe a
2,500-watt,

3,000-watt lamp. Drive-ins usually use a minimum of 4,000 watts, up to 7,000 watts, depending on the size of the screen. -What we have here is a platter system, where you can put your entire movie together, spliced end to end, and it just runs through. And as it plays, it rewinds itself. You don't have to be in the booth all the time. -Sound technology pretty much stayed the same all the way into the 1970s, when they came up with the concept of of radio sound, where they could broadcast the soundtrack of the movie over your car radio. -With low-frequency radio transmission as a means of delivering sound. -The power was confined pretty much to just a quarter-mile radius of the theater. -Radio sound caught on very, very quickly. Sort of instantly transferred to all the theaters, and they literally just took the speaker boxes out but left the speaker poles and everything else in place. -I was used to seeing them all those years, though, and it almost looked like a chicken that you took the feathers off of. -They would eventually take out the speaker poles, like if they had to repave the theater. That would be the time that you would take it out, and you would just, like, make it smooth. -We used to have a thriving downtown. All the stores were downtown, and you walked on the street, and you saw people, and you would talk. -The downtown was dying. People didn't go downtown anymore. It wasn't safe. It wasn't kept up. And all throughout the '70s, the issue of crime was really significant. We started seeing these covered malls be really important. -And when they built the first shopping center, we had an inside thing to walk in. We didn't really know what to do in there. -No longer had the sort of town-meeting place where you would go. Now it was gonna be at a closed mall, because they were safer. And you also would see the rise of theaters in the mall. These sort of smaller venues, sometimes 2 or 3 or as many as 10 smaller theaters. -Hometown theaters were always single screen. What you saw with the ascension of mall theaters and youths going to the malls is that it really depressed the drive-in theater business. -And the exhibitors came

upon the idea of, let's divide these old movie palaces that could hold maybe 500 or 600 or 1,000 people into a multiplex. -They would take their indoor theater, just build a wall down the middle to make two screens, and then eventually they were just starting to build them as four screens, five screens, and more. -They started building 10 plexes, 12 plexes, 14 plexes. -4 screens to 18. -16 and 32 and 100 screen, whatever they were. So they didn't have the 1,200-seat theaters till they had put it on four, 250-seat stadium seating. -Drive-ins were losing their product. They were going to indoor-theater screens. -And sometimes you would be in a little screening room, an auditorium that might not be that much bigger than your living room. -And, of course, those were the first small screens that any of us had ever seen. -The drive-ins had to compete so they would start adding on screens. -I believe the second screen went up in '82. And it was probably a couple of years after that theater 3 went up. And what we were indeed doing is, we're competing with the indoors. -I think they started off with two screens and then expanded out to four, and that's pretty much a typical story of drive-ins and their bid for survival. -When it became multi-screen, it was kind of strange, because you could turn your head and see the other screen. You could turn around and see what was happening over there. -When you look at a drive-in's layout, you can definitely see where, at some later point in time, they added in one that maybe wasn't originally planned. -What we find with the drive-ins is that a three-screen drive-in theater, like the one that we're in today, the Van Buren, is really too small. We really feel most comfortable having four or five screens, because that gives us the widest range of being able to keep current with the studios to show all the new releases, to do what we need to do to show movies. -You cannot exist as a single-screen theater, whether you're an indoor theater or a drive-in theater. It just is not economically possible. [Techno music plays] Cable television,

Blockbuster video -- those things all happened in the early '80s. -And with VCRs coming out, people weren't as interested in drive-ins anymore. They may have not gone as often as they used to, and that, maybe, you can blame on the advent of home video and how it took over. -First, there was the BETA tape and the VHS tape. -I remember going into that Blockbuster and going, "Wow, this is so amazing!" -Cable television, particularly HBO and, later, Showtime, started in the '80s. -HBO was a really big thing. It cost a lot of money, so people who had it tended to want to stay home. -We started distributing our films primarily for HBO. -DVD and now blu-ray. -There's TiVo and DVRs and everything that allows us to watch what we want, when we want. More opportunities to kind of control one's own destiny. Video games especially took off in arcades. Gradually, they became enjoyed more in private households. A major cultural force in competition with movies, so much so that I think movies are trying to adopt some of the logic of video games. -The land seemed inexhaustible -- a land of quiet main streets. Today, the land is being swallowed up at the rate of one million acres a year. -As we had suburban sprawl, cities expanded. Drive-ins became surrounded by development. -Now the drive-in was in the city. -In an area where I lived, which was just stuffed with apartment buildings, just right behind it, there was one. -At one point, my father lived in a building that overlooked a drive-in. -A drive-in theater owner had to pay more taxes 'cause his land value kept going up. -In a lot of cases, somebody else owns the land. -The leases would have run out in the '50s, and rather than renewing leases, the owners of the ground, they could sell and make more money. -I don't know if I believe that they were less popular than they were. I think they just kind of got pushed out, and it became so expensive to maintain it. These lots -- they not only fell out of favor, they fell. -Then a decrease in attendance that you experienced in the '70s might make people take it down. [Mid-tempo music plays] -We drove past it. Everybody knew, without anybody saying anything, that the drive-in was done. It was over. -We had a

drive-in theater
in north Hollywood called the Victory. It was so well-loved that when they
decided they were
gonna tear the drive-in down, this man chained himself to the top of the
screen tower
for two days in protest of destroying
that beautiful screen tower. [Mid-tempo rock music plays] -Not even a
matter of whether or not the drive-in
is doing a good business or is still profitable. It's that the land can
make
more money as something else. - Money makes the world
go round -The property that they were on
became such a premium. - Makes the world go 'round -That money was out
there, and a lot of guys
took advantage of it. -All of them
in Los Angeles County, and there were 60 or 70 of them
at one time. They're all gone. -Land that held
drive-in movie theaters sometimes
is much more profitable to be sold to developers. - Money makes
the world go round And 'round and 'round
and 'round, yeah Money
- Money - Making the world go round - Go round -Developers would come in,
and they'd say
to a drive-in theater owner that was making
\$10,000 a year profit, "I'll give you \$500,000
for your property," and they're like --
they think they've made it. And they had. -If somebody comes along
and says, "Here, I'll give you
\$2 million for your property," well, pfft, it's gone. -Walmarts were buying
the properties and whatnot. - They tore down the drive-in
with a wrecking ball Put up a Walmart
and a shopping mall -Now we find a lot of Walmarts or Home Depots
or Lowe's in those places. Unfortunately, a drive-in
is a nice, big piece of land that doesn't have
too many structures that need to be torn down. It's in a memorable
location. You know, everybody knows where the old Skylight drive-in
used to be, and it's at the intersection
of freeways. So it's prime real estate and really attractive
to the big-box retailers. -For every million people
in America, there are "x" amount
of McDonald's. There are "x" amount
of Walmarts -- you know,
it grows, it grows -- and there was one
drive-in theater. -We formed

the Friends of the Grandview to preserve the Grandview and have it renovated. At that time, we didn't know anything about a Walmart deal. We just knew that the property owners weren't doing any maintenance and weren't allowing it to open. -We have one big rubber stamp running down this road. Burger king, and then we have McDonald's, and then we have the Walmart. And you know what? It just repeats every so many miles. -And to take what makes your city and your town unique and bulldoze it down for another generic Walmart makes no sense. -There's a large influence of consumer culture that has made shopping not just something that you do when you need to, but kind of a preferred leisure activity. -The public needs to be more involved in their communities. They shouldn't let national corporations change the face of their communities. [Rock music plays] -There are a lot of efforts to preserve those structures. Even if the drive-in has to go, sometimes they can still preserve the marquee. There are a lot of drive-ins that have historical significance, and one angle that groups of supporters will use to try and save a drive-in and keep it from a strip mall is to try and get landmark status or something along those lines. And even once that has happened, I know the one on Route 66, the Azusa foothill -- they were successful in declaring certain historical status for that site. But that doesn't necessarily keep it from being developed. -The 41 Twin was the place I worked at the last few years it was open. I knew that if it could get a marker, it wasn't gonna stop the demolition. But I just didn't want it to be forgotten. The 41 Twin now has a marker on the site. People can go up there anytime they want and look at it, and hopefully it will bring back a little, fond memory. -I can now drive around, and I can spot a drive-in location. You know what those properties look like, and you can kind of look at it and say, "I bet that was a drive-in." -But you can see that the snack bar still stands the way it was. -Kind of neat to look over time. You can see a satellite image. People have shared with us all sorts of things, not just snapshots of drive-ins. We have had people send aerial maps, terraserver images,

satellite images, photographs of ticket stubs, or an ashtray that has a drive-in's name on it. -I certainly remember it in "Grease" and lot of teenage movies in which they're going to the drive-in. -[Sneezes] -I hope you're not getting a cold. -Oh, no. No. It's just probably a little drive-in dust. That's all. -I think now when you're trying to show life in the '50s, you can kind of pinpoint it, like, "Oh, yeah, this must be the '50s, because they're going to a drive-in." It gives you a certain cultural identification. -You sure you want to do this? -I came here to see a movie, and I'm gonna see a movie. -You can still have dialogue going on. Whereas if they're in the movie theater, it's pretty static, or it has to be before the movie starts. So if you're in a drive-in, you can still advance the plot and be showing this sort of cultural phenomenon at the same time. [Laughter] -The revolutionary ideals of your forefathers are corrupted and sold in alleys... -There will always be a need to show drive-ins in television and movies, and it's a wonderful cultural icon for that particular reason. [Rock music plays] -One of our challenges is converting this property from an alternative-use property, which is used for many events, from the orange county marketplace to the fair to our drive-in. The atmosphere that we want to create here is a very friendly, very safe family atmosphere where people can come together as a community. If they sit in their car, we hope they'll talk to their neighbor. We live in a world where the garage doors come down, and people are very scheduled in terms of their time. So providing a family-and-community-oriented activity is critical to what we're trying to accomplish here. -Despite the fact that these places are disappearing, they're actually a little bit on the upswing right now. -There really has been a sort of rediscovery of drive-ins going on. Over the last 5 to 10 years, we not only have younger people getting into the business. People of all ages discovering the drive-in, either again or for the first time. -And all these feelings that they had when they were kids or when they were younger adults that they kind of just put aside -- because they thought

drive-ins were dead or dying -- come back out, and they get really enthusiastic. -It's not the drive-in that they remember in the '70s, with rowdy kids and beer parties. -Parents come to us and say they're really glad that we made it different than what they remember. -They're amazed that there's no more speakers, that it comes over the radio. -Put in F.M. stereo sound. -They're definitely not as interesting as they were. They're usually just a metal frame with a flat panel. -Finally now we're gonna be waiting to see what the outcome of this digital revolution is. We're gonna have to convert over to digital or close, obviously. But we're gonna have to make some improvements, because of the physical requirements of digital. -I don't think that a lot of people knew that there were drive-ins around. -When I'm there on a Saturday afternoon and I'm cleaning up or I'm doing something and somebody drives in and says, "A drive-in? Are you open?" -"We thought these were all gone." -Even the people that are out here at this one, when you say to them, "Oh, yeah, there are other drive-ins around," they'll go, "Oh, really?" Like, "Tell me more." -I think the term "the drive-ins are dying" is incorrect. They're coming back, and they're coming back very uniquely, because everyone that builds one has a really unique personality. [Mid-tempo music plays] -When we finally got the paperwork and everything done and bought the place, it was seven days before it was scheduled to be demolished. And then in 2000, we added more screens. -We have room for 3,200 cars. I think we're the largest drive-in in the country right now. Open 365 days a year in Detroit. -Drive-in theater owners and drive-in in particular have been very resilient. -Your hometown drive-in will be different than any other drive-in in the nation, because of the people that own them. -What goes around comes around, you know. And drive-ins -- they were down at one time, and now we definitely feel that they are coming back. -Will it ever be back to 5,000 screens? No. But I think that any losses that we have are now stabilized, and I think there's now room

for some growth. -Maybe we have to put together a 30-second Super Bowl commercial or something to let 94 million viewers know that there are drive-ins out there. -I heard in Alabama, they got around 12 drive-ins. Most of them have either been new builds or ones that have been reopened after being closed for several years. That is a testimony right there to the popularity coming back. 'Cause why would you build a drive-in? Why would you spend all that money to reopen a drive-in if nobody's gonna come? Freedom, Wisconsin -- they actually built a drive-in from the ground up. I got to witness that. It's kind of nice to see a drive-in being built instead of being torn down. -We had 150 cars show up with no advertising, and that was the start of our drive-in. -We saw the Raleigh Road outdoor theater in Henderson, North Carolina, on ebay, and it was in such a bad state of repair. But we had a dream as to what we could do with it. -He had the dream. I was ready to kill him. -[Chuckles] [Rock music plays] -Tonight, we're reopening the drive-in after 19 years of being dark. We've been getting incredible comments. A lot of new potential customers -- over 7,000 people on Facebook, thanking us for reopening the drive-in. -As a businessman, I know for a fact that the highest and best economic use for my 15 acres in the industrial park in Watertown is not a drive-in. I know that. -We made a solemn promise that whatever we made off the drive-in, we're putting it right back into it. -Walmart's not coming. You know, they're not gonna come buy my little drive-in and make it a Supercenter. That's not gonna happen. -We've invested everything we can. We haven't taken any salary out of our theater. -We're trying to keep it for future generations down the road to come out and enjoy it. [Rock music plays] -I think families have rediscovered what the drive-in is about. -It's amazing how it goes through the process of a couple when they first start dating. And then a couple years later, they'll tell you they got married. And then you see

kids in the car, and then the kids are grown up,
running around in pajamas. It's just absolutely amazing. -We get first-run
movies, where they didn't get
first-run movies before. -There's a lot more
animated movies. -Family pictures
are really, really the bread and butter
of the business. There's just no two ways
about it. -We could have a really bad day. And as soon as we step
on that property, it just, you know,
like there was clouds and rain, and all of a sudden, boom,
the sun comes out. We just love it. -Seeing the families come and seeing
the kids enjoy it
is worth a million dollars. -Yes, it is. I agree. -One little girl e-mailed
me, and she says
that she's going to the drive-in to find her future husband, because that's
where
her mom found her dad. -Here Friday or Saturday night, you got the American
family
together under the stars watching an outdoor movie in the nostalgia
of a drive-in theater. What's better? [Rock music continues] -And now on
with the show. [Upbeat rock music plays] - Don't let your parents know
We're gonna be
where the cool kids go - At the drive-in - We're gonna stay out late - At
the drive-in - We're gonna celebrate And have some popcorn, too You'll know
what to do - I'm at the drive-in - You can lay your head
on my shoulder You can cry
when the sad part comes You can hide your eyes
from the monster We'll cheer
'cause the good guys won Don't let your parents know We never really take
it slow - at the drive-in - We'll be in the backseat - At the drive-in -[
Singing indistinctly] You'll know what to do - At the drive-in - We're
gonna celebrate We're gonna stay out late - At the drive-in - We're gonna
scream
and shout When the stars comes out - At the drive-in At the drive-in At the
drive-in -whoo!