

Schuylkill Mall Theatres plans bigger screens, stadium seating

BY STEPHEN J. PYTAK (STAFF WRITER SPYTAK@REPUBLICANHERALD.COM)

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For the first time in its 31-year history, the theater at Schuylkill Mall will get a complete makeover, according to Mark Clement, its current manager.

King Theatre Circuit, Philadelphia, which signed a lease to operate the four-screen Schuylkill Mall Theatres in October 2010, and Empire Realty Investments Inc., Philadelphia, which bought the Schuylkill Mall in March 2007, plan to invest \$1.6 million to give the region's moviegoers something new, Clement said.

By May 1, the theater will be upgraded from an 800-seat venue with four screens to an 825-seat venue with six screens. There will be a renovated lobby. There will be new signs for the theater at the mall's north entrance and

the free-standing internally lit sign near Route 61 will also be replaced, Clement said.

The theater will also have a new name, "The Pearl at Schuylkill Mall with PXC." The theater will continue its outdoor, drive-in operation as well during the warmer weather.

This is one of the numerous efforts local malls have put forth going into 2012. Another is the establishment of Kohl's at Fairlane Village, Pottsville. Meanwhile, Mother Bear's candy shop opened recently in the Cressona Mall and Dunham's Sports is expected to open at the Schuylkill Mall in the spring.

"It shows that there's growth in Schuylkill County and we're doing our best to make life better for everybody," Clement said.

"We have secured an architect to prepare architectural and design drawings for that expansion. We are confident the project will continue to move forward and anticipate a long-term relationship with King Theatre as the premier provider of theater entertainment in the region," Schuylkill Mall Manager Elaine Maneval said.

JKR Partners LLC, Philadelphia, are the architects on the project and the general contractor is LTCI Ltd., Hatboro, Clement said.

"We're looking for the renovations to begin around the middle of February," he said, and operations at the theater will scale down to two theaters while the renovations are being done.

The new lobby will extend into the gaming lounge, once called "Electronic Experience," he said.

Clement said the upgrades will also include:

- Five theaters with wall-to-wall screens.
- One large-format screen theater.
- All-stadium seating.
- All-digital projection theaters which are 3D-enabled.
- New high-back rocker chairs with cup holders.

King Theatre Circuit is also in the process of changing its name, according to Clement.

"Pearl is going to be the name of our new company," Clement said.

Bruce Taffet, who heads King Theatre Circuit, has started a chain of theaters that include The Pearl Theatre at Avenue North, Philadelphia, Clement said.

"So we decided since this would be part of the same chain," Clement said.

Meanwhile, PXC stands for "Pearl Extreme Cinema," Clement said.

Just as IMAX has become a brand name in entertainment, Clement said "PXC" is forging its own brand.

"It's not going to be an IMAX. It's a system which is in competition with the IMAX. We think we're going to take ours one step further," Clement said.

This is the second major project Empire Realty and King Theatre Circuit has done in the past year to offer more options for moviegoers.

In August, they invested \$175,000 to add an outdoor, two-screen all-digital theater drive-in. Called "Movies on the Mountain," it opened on weekends during the summer and early fall and patrons were able to hear the presentations through the FM radios in their vehicles.