

A Rocket Lands in the District

Written by Mike Schulz
Tuesday, 10 May 2005 18:00

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When it was announced that the Brew & View's Devin Hansen, this spring, would open a similar theater, The Rocket, in the District of Rock Island's long-defunct Capri Cinema, the reaction of Brew & View regulars was generally twofold: an emphatic "Hooray!" followed by a quick "Huh?" After all, the Capri stands not four blocks from the Brew & View, and one such venue in the District was already more than film fans should have hoped for. Many wondered: Was the area really ready to house *two*?

"I'm curious to see that myself," Hansen admits.

For fans of alternative cinema, the Brew & View's 2002 opening came as a blessed relief. Hansen's venue mixes an art-house ambiance with the comfort of a favorite local watering hole, and with its frequent bookings of independent releases, documentaries, and foreign titles, the establishment quickly became the go-to spot for moviegoers seeking a break from traditional multiplex fare. (In the *River Cities' Reader's* annual Best of the Quad Cities poll, the Brew & View was named Best Kept Secret in the Quad Cities in 2003 and 2004, and Best Locally Owned Business of 2004.) Many of its customers love the theater so much that it's easy to become irrationally upset if one particular feature stays for a long period of time; die-hard fans want to see a new feature there *every week*.

Once inside The Rocket, though, even in its still-under-construction phase, it becomes clear that this establishment will be far more than just Brew & View: The Sequel. The first thing one notices is that, compared to the intimate Brew & View, The Rocket – named in honor of the Capri's original, late-'30s moniker – feels *huge*, with its three-tiered seating, forty to fifty tabletops, and 175 seats (compared to the Brew & View's 65). Also, at roughly 20 feet by 40 feet, the screen is twice as big as the one at its sister venue, and movie fans will be happy to learn that widescreen presentations will be uncropped here, which has long been a source of contention at Hansen's original locale.

As befits its larger space, the movies that Hansen plans to screen at The Rocket will be of grander scope, as well. "The Rocket will have more of a 'theater' atmosphere than the Brew & View, which is kind of all over the board," he says, referring to the establishment's screenings of

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free Saturday matinees, midnight movies, and small-scale films unfamiliar to many audiences. “At The Rocket, we’re going to start out showing second-run mainstream movies and bigger-named indie films,” such as the family comedy *Millions*, which will be The Rocket’s debut presentation. (The Rocket has a tentative opening date of May 27.) “We have a really good relationship with independent movie companies. ... We’ve brought in some movies that originally played at Showcase 53, and we actually *outgrossed* them at the Brew & View,” he says, referring to releases such as *Sideways*, which played at Hansen’s theatre for nearly three months.

In addition to variation in the films shown, Hansen adds that The Rocket will also feature a new, expanded menu – “a big salad, tacos, Chicago-style hot dogs” – and will be available as a venue for wedding receptions, concerts, and special events. “We’ve got the Grammy-nominated group Nashville Pussy booked for June 15,” he reveals, “and we’re on a waiting list for David Cross’ comedy tour.”

With the Brew & View’s devoted but specific audience, Hansen’s decision to launch another alternative theater sounded, to many, financially risky. Yet Hansen states that although both venues share a common purpose, they are, monetarily, almost completely independent of one another. “With The Rocket,” he says, “I’ve got three partners, including myself, and we’re all putting in money. I also rounded up three investors who are pretty much hardcore Brew & View junkies – they come to every film – and we gave them an investment opportunity. And the landlords here have been helping a lot as well. I didn’t take any money out of the Brew & View to make this happen. It’s a completely separate business.” Hansen does add, though, that the two venues “will be able to split some costs, like advertising and my salary – things like that.”

Still, two alternative movie theaters located within such a close radius does seem unusual – locating The Rocket elsewhere in the Quad Cities might have seemed a more logical option. Yet Hansen’s attachment to the Rock Island locale is one he’s felt for years. “This is where I originally wanted to have the Brew & View,” he reveals. “When the idea first popped up, my uncle, Larry Meadows, said it would be great to do something like the McMenamins in Portland,” referring to the famed Oregon lodging establishment, a historic elementary school that was renovated into one of the state’s most popular inns, complete with restaurant, brewery, and, yes, movie theater. “My uncle said we should make something like that in the old Capri.

“It wasn’t available to us then, so that’s when I sought out the original, smaller Brew & View. But now that we’ve established ourselves at the Brew & View and have made a name for ourselves, we were able to come in here. It worked out great. This is where I wanted the business to be all along.”

Once the Capri did become available to him, Hansen considered transplanting the Brew & View to this new venue, abandoning thoughts of a second theater entirely. “I thought about that,” he admits, yet the look on his face suggests a parent’s reaction if asked to give up one child for another. “But I guess I have too much attachment to the first [locale]. The Brew & View has a certain vibe, a certain feel. I mean,” he adds, “that’s the heart and soul of my business.”

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And, with hopes high for the success of The Rocket and the continued success of the Brew & View, this Rock Island native makes no bones about wanting to keep his latest project within the confines of his hometown. "Rock Island's been really good to me," Hansen says, smiling. "I love Rock Island."