

Stanley Durwood

Inventor of the Movie Multiplex
1921-1999

by Susan Jezak Ford

Going to the movies today means choosing from several films at your nearest theater. Yet it took one man to dream up the idea of showing more than one movie in a suburban theater. Stan Durwood, lifelong Kansas City resident, took his idea for the multiplex movie theater to more than 200 theaters across the United States and in five other countries.

Durwood was born into show business. His father and uncle, Edward and Maurice Dubinsky, performed in tent shows across the Midwest, eventually settling in Kansas City. They bought a movie theater in the 1920s and owned a dozen within ten years. Stan Durwood joined the family business, Durwood Theaters, in 1945 and took over in 1960 when his father died.

The country's first multi-screen theater was built at Ward Parkway Shopping Center in 1962. The building's structure couldn't support the beams for a large, single screen, so Durwood built two smaller theaters. AMC Entertainment, Durwood's company, opened its first four-plex in 1966 and a six-plex in 1969, a different movie showed on each screen.

Durwood's theaters and dreams grew. Twelve and fourteen screens became common in suburban AMC multiplexes. The company ventured to other cities, housing 24 and 30 screens within megaplexes.

Locally, Durwood and AMC poured intensive efforts into revitalizing downtown Kansas City through a 1997 plan, the Power and Light District. Voters approved tax benefits for the proposed \$454 million entertainment district, but momentum was lost as Durwood's health declined.

In his 70s, Stan Durwood mingled with movie patrons on Saturday nights, did one-handed push-ups and displayed his uncanny ability to remember the birth date of nearly everyone he met. The vibrant man lost his fight to cancer in the summer of 1999. Nearly 700 people attended a tribute to the movie mogul held at the Midland



Theater. The celebration, planned by Durwood, included bagpipe players, barbeque, live jazz, laughter, and tears.

Sources

Cline, Andy. "Downtown Dreams." *Ingram's* 23 (May 5, 1997): 50-55.

"Friends, Admirers Gather to Pay Tribute to Movie Theater Mogul Stan Durwood." *The Kansas City Star*, 24 July 1999, C1.

"Movie Theater Mogul Dies." *The Kansas City Star*, 16 July 1999, A1.

© 2003

Photo: Courtesy of *The Kansas City Star*.