



THE OLD GLORY OF STARS & STRIPES

By Jordan Gass-Poore

Drive-In Theater Experiences Are Back In Vogue. Gas Up The Muscle Car, Grab The Lawn Chairs, And Enjoy Movies The Old Fashioned Way.

New Braunfels was hungry for a slice of Americana. So Ryan Smith, his wife and parents served it to them in the form of a drive-in theater.

Stars & Stripes, Smith's second drive-in, opened in April less than a mile off Interstate 35. This 1,200-car, three-screen theater is the only operating drive-in within a 70-mile radius of the city.

Smith opened the first Stars & Stripes in Lubbock in 2003 with his two sisters. In April 2011, the theater upgraded its technology to become what may be the world's first digital multi-screen outdoor theater.

Digital helped solve the problem of not getting enough light on the outdoor screen for viewers to see what's projected.

There are other benefits as well. "There's no sticky floors, no kids kicking your seat," Smith said of why people choose a drive-in instead of at a multiplex. "People don't want to just sit in a room, they want to talk and text."

Modern drive-in sound is conducive to individualized moviegoing experiences. Now, instead of a speaker box on a pole outside of the vehicle, moviegoers can tune their FM stereos to a specific frequency to hear the movie from their vehicle's speakers.

Smith's first experience with a drive-in movie was in 2002, when he saw "Signs" at what was once his grandfather's theater.

The Sky-View opened in 1948 in the farming community of Lamesa, south of Lubbock. Smith's grandfather, R.A. "Skeet" Noret was 25 years old when it was built.

The theater gained legendary status for a performance by then unknown musician Buddy Holly, who performed on the roof of the theater's projector building.

The Sky-View served as an inspiration for Smith's first drive-in. He left law school at 25 to open Stars & Stripes, the same age his grandfather was when he built the Sky-View.

The theater brought West Texans out in droves. Its popularity led to a three-year search for property along the Austin-San Antonio Corridor to build a second location.

A spot was soon discovered in New Braunfels, once home to the Tower Drive-In, a 250-car theater that opened in 1950.

Linda Dietert, The Sophienburg Museum and Archives director, said she and her husband Mike had their first date at the Tower.

Smith contacted The Sophienburg for information about New Braunfels history. The museum shared photos and background information of the Tower, which closed in the 1980s.

Now, Central Texans can enjoy up to three nightly, first-run double features (two movies for the price of one ticket) from the comfort of their vehicle or lawn chair, or from a covered or uncovered patio where live music will eventually be played.

The master plan includes adding a playground and a fourth screen, so more people can take advantage of the area's moderate weather and Hill Country scenery.

Keeping with the retro 1950s theme, Stars & Stripes' 50's Cafe offers hamburgers and chicken strips, among the theater food classics. Pizza, wings and milkshakes are expected to be added to the menu.

While the decline of the drive-in has been lamented for decades, the Stars & Stripes proves it's style is going back to the future.



Stars & Stripes Drive-in Theatre

1178 Kroesche Ln, New Braunfels

830-620-SHOW(7469)

Adult ticket ages 12+ \$8

Kid ticket ages 4 - 11 \$5

Ages 3 and under free

driveinusa.com

