

Marana gets Multiplex

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Arizona Pavilions becomes an even more appealing Northwest Side destination this week with the opening of Tower Theatres, a 12-screen, locally owned, first-run movie house.

It's the Tucson area's first major theater opening since the 20-plex at Park Place in 2001, and it brings much-needed entertainment to the fast-growing Northwest Side.

"I think it will be good. It'll give people around here something to do," said 21-year-old Shalana Frank, a 2004 Marana High School graduate who works as a barista at It's a Grind, a nearby coffeehouse.

"I usually go to either Foothills or the El Con Mall. I'll probably start going to the new theater. See where it's at — how good service is, I guess. I think it's good that they're building around here and planning to build all these houses and everything. It helps the community a little more."

The theater follows the recent additions of Chili's and In-N-Out Burger in the ever-expanding shopping center west of Interstate 10 near Cortaro Road and Arizona Pavilions Drive.

Tower Theatres can seat up to 2,200 moviegoers, with auditoriums that range in size from 92 to 296 seats.

There's also an arcade and party room that can be rented for get-togethers, and the potential to one day expand to 16 screens.

"I think it's a beautiful theater," said Kent Edwards, a managing partner.

"I hope the community appreciates the fact that we built the theater not just as a box to go watch movies in, but someplace comfortable to take families to. It's not going to be a big, cavernous place with big screens."

You'll be comfortable

Edwards says the auditoriums are some of the industry's most comfortable, promising wider seats, a higher line of sight and more legroom than other Southern Arizona theaters.

"My son was in there and fell asleep on one of the seats. It's a nice experience, and the theaters are very comfortable," he said. "If a 6-foot-4 guy walks past you, you're not going to need to squish your legs. He's going to get around you without distracting you."

The theater is an ambitious expansion for Edwards, who is also a partner in Grand Cinemas, which operates two second-run theaters: Crossroads, 4811 E. Grant Road; and Oracle View, 4690 N. Oracle Road.

"Marana is growing," Edwards said. "The area is filling in quickly. Wal-Mart, Kohl's, In-N-Out: Those places do their homework and see the area is viable with the population growth. As far as entertainment, all there was, was a bowling alley and Famous Sam's. The area definitely needed a movie theater."

What's behind the name

The 70-foot-high lighted tower that's the building's standout feature is purely aesthetic.

"The name is easy for people to remember," Edwards said, and the tower gives the building a landmark. "It was originally 45 feet high, but we got it up to 70 feet. The bottom is a maintenance room."

Now playing

The theater will focus primarily on big-budget, big-studio movies, but will also include art films.

"We're going to try them from time to time, and if we get support we're going to bring them back," Edwards said.

"At different times of year there are more opportunities. In February, March and April, there are a lot of options to play with," meaning there is potential for more art films in the spring. "We'll give it a shot. I don't know how sophisticated, quality films will play in this community against the crash- 'em-up action, but we're going to give them a chance, absolutely."

This weekend's slate has 12 films, including "The Golden Compass," "This Christmas" and "No Country for Old Men."