

Central Oklahoma



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Central Oklahoma



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Next meeting:

The May meeting

will be held at M & W Wallpaper,
3000 N. MacArthur at 3:00 p.m.

Sunday

May 16, 2004

May Dinner Cruise: Saturday, May 22, 2004

Meet at the Burger King, N.E. 23rd & I-35 at 2 p.m.

We will take a 2 hour cruise via back roads to Ben's BBQ
in Seminole. (There will be a pit stop along the way.)

Hosted by Rudy & Gloria Escalera 799-1249

Mark your calendars!

11th Annual Classic Chevy Fall Foliage Cruise October 22-24, 2004 - Poteau, OK

Days Inn, 1702 Broadway, Poteau, OK 74953

Reservations (918) 647-3510

1 King or 2 Queen Beds \$68.40

Block held for Classic Chevy Club until September 15th

For further information call Martha Duerksen (405) 324-2228

Visit us on the Web — <http://www.55-57chevys.com/coccc>

The Dashboard

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May 2004

Remembering Oklahoma's Drive In Theaters

by Karla Neese, Staff Writer,
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seniors and the issues that matter to
them most. You can view it online at
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Remember when the hottest
place to be on a Saturday
night was crammed sardine-
style in a great looking car, gaz-
ing up at a giant screen?

Before the days of air-con-
ditioned multiplex theaters
with cushiony stadium seating,
digital sound, and \$5 tubs of
battered popcorn, there was
the simplicity of the drive-in
movie theater.

The history of the drive-in
movie theater dates back to the
early 1930s. Up until that time,
movie theaters enjoyed immense
popularity, even though movie
audiences were generally divided
into two categories – children
who went to matinees during the
day, and adults who dressed up
and went during the evening.
Would-be inventor Richard M.
Hollingshead, Jr. envisioned a
new type of movie-going
experience that would bring
families together.

He tested his concept by
mounting a 1928 Kodak projector
onto the hood of his car, nailing
a sheet between two trees in his
New Jersey backyard, and
placing a radio behind the screen.
After considerable testing and
tinkering, he applied for – and
eventually received – a patent
for the drive-in movie theater.

In the summer of 1933, the
very first drive-in movie theater
opened in Camden, NJ. Admission
was only 25¢ per car and 25¢ per
person, with a maximum charge
of \$1 per car. The first showing
was the movie *Wife Beware*.

More than a decade would
pass before the idea took off in
Oklahoma. However, once it took
hold, the drive-in remained a
favorite choice of entertainment
for thousands of Oklahomans
for more than four decades.

At the end of World War II,
drive-in theaters began popping
up all across the nation, including
the very first one in Oklahoma.
Within a short three-year period,
from 1946 to 1948, the number
of drive-ins increased from 102
to 820 in the United States.

According to Wesley Horton,
an Oklahoma City native and
founder of the American Institute
of Drive-In Archaeology, the
Sooner State's first drive-in
theater was the Austin Drive-In
of Lawton. Opened in 1946,
the theater was owned and
operated by local residents Will
and Earl Austin.

The following year, on July 2,
1947, the first two theaters in
Oklahoma City opened to the
public. The NW Hi-Way Drive-in
Theater



The Winchester Drive-In, which opened July 3, 1968 is Oklahoma City's last remaining operational drive-in theater. Photo courtesy Wesley Horton

was located in northwest
Oklahoma City on what is
the present site of the Mar-
riott Hotel on Northwest
Expressway. The second,
Odom's Drive-In – later to
be named 77 Drive-In – was
located between Oklahoma
City and Norman on old
Highway 77, near the pre-
sent-day 9300 block of South
Shields.

Most drive-ins, like the
Odom, popped up on the out-
skirts of towns, where land
was plentiful and cheap.
Because the drive-in theater
was fairly inexpensive to get
started, the idea quickly
caught on. By 1965, there
were more than 100 drive-ins

across the state, with 13
theaters operating in the
Oklahoma City area at one
time, said Horton.

The movie-going family
event that inventor Hollingshead
had envisioned decades earlier
was a reality. Mom and dad
would load up the kids in the
family car and head out for a
Friday or Saturday night
movie. Some theater owners
began realizing the family
appeal of their business and
installed playgrounds at the
front of the drive-in, just
under the big screen. Many
Oklahoma City residents will
remember the Twilight Gardens
Drive-In Theater, formerly
located at 2209 W. Britton
Road, which even went so far
as to install a child's ride-
along train around the
perimeter of the playground.

Many of us have very vivid
memories of the drive-in
theaters we frequented. Horton
says that his memories of the
drive-in are not just about
going to see a movie. "It wasn't
just about the movie. It was
the whole experience," he said.
"One of the drive-ins we
visited as a family was the
Hillcrest Drive-In. Because
the theater was near the Will
Rogers Airport, you would
have the lights and sounds
from the airplanes, the warm
summer night air, the images
and sounds of the movie, and
the smells of popcorn coming
from the concession stand
all mixing together to create
the wonderful genre of the
drive-in theater. It was a
real adventure for a kid."

The drive-in soon became
the destination of choice for
teenagers as well. One
Oklahoma senior recently
shared her memories of
Saturday nights at the
drive-in. "You had to hurry
in order to get to the theater
in time to get a good spot.
A good spot was one in the
center section at least two
rows behind the refreshment
stand. When the movie was
over, the rush to get out of
the parking lot began. It was
not unusual on a summer
Saturday night to have to
wait in exit lines for at least
15 minutes." (continued page 2)

Longing to take a drive down memory lane?

Then cruise on over to the two drive-in movie theaters that are still operating in the Oklahoma City area.

The Winchester Drive-In,

6930 S Western Ave, Oklahoma City, (405) 631-8851

The Winchester's season runs from April through October and is open seven nights a week during the peak summer season and on weekends only during the spring and fall. Gates open at 7:30pm. Admission: \$5 per adult; \$2 for kids aged 4-10 years.

The Winchester Drive-In is located just a few blocks north of I-240 on Western. The well-known marquee, which can be seen for blocks, features a larger-than-life cowboy holding a Winchester rifle.

The Beacon Drive-In,

2404 S. Division Street, Guthrie (405) 282-4512

The Beacon opened in 1950 and has been continuously operated since then by the Powell family. The drive-in opens for business in April and operates seven nights a week during peak season (Memorial Day through Labor Day) and on the weekends only in September and October. The theater features single screenings, traditional drive-in speakers, and a local vicinity FM radio broadcast for soundtracks. Admission: \$4 per adult. Free for kids 11 and under. The Beacon Drive-In is located 15 minutes north of Edmond. To get there, take exit 153 off I-35.

Drive-Ins (continued from page 1)

As more and more houses popped up around the drive-ins, many new homeowners complained that all the traffic, noise and debris from the drive-in made living next to one less than ideal. According to Horton, the 14 Flags Drive-In, formerly located at 9901 S. Western, went so far as to install sound speakers in the surrounding homes as a way to appease their nearby neighbors, who were then able to watch and hear the movies for free.

As the cities and suburbs continued to grow, the fledgling cities needed space for the new housing and shopping spaces. Many of the drive-in theaters that once were comfortably outside of the city limits found themselves engulfed by the city on all sides. All too often as the city grew around the largely vacant lots, they were sold off to become housing additions, shopping centers, or large discount stores.

At its peak in 1958, there were nearly 4,100 drive-in theaters in the United States. Within 30 years, that number had dropped to just less than 1,000. The reasons for the downfall of the drive-in are many, said Horton. Daylight savings time, which took effect in 1968, was a large contributing factor. The late summer evening became dark even later, and so the already narrow window for a family to enjoy a movie on a work day became smaller. In addition, rising fuel prices resulted in cars getting smaller and people driving less. "It is not really as easy to stretch out and enjoy a movie with the family in a 1975 Toyota as it was in a 1955 Chevrolet," said Horton.

As the seventies gave way to the eighties, consumers demanded more for their entertainment dollar. Less efficient drive-in theaters and single-screen theaters went the way of the Edsel. As multi-screen theaters with reclining seats and Dolby surround sound captured an even larger market share, the drive-in faced declining revenues. Standard televisions with limited stations soon gave way to cable television and VCRs, and the era of the couch potato was born. Families could now stay home and have an entire evening's worth of entertainment without leaving the comfort of their living rooms.

"The few remaining drive-theaters have a tenacious grip on their existence," said Horton. "They do so at the convenience and the nostalgia of the communities they occupy. Most drive-in theaters still in existence are operated as a labor of love and not for the hopes of profit."

Drive-in theaters are having a brief renaissance, as aging baby boomers revisit their youth and the items of familiarity from childhood. For many, going back to the drive-in is like taking a trip back in time.

For whatever reason, it was a simpler time, a time when families spent time together. "I can think of no better way to spend a warm summer night as a family than at the drive-in," Horton said.

Dinner Cruise

Curtis and Kay Welch ordered up a beautiful day for the April Dinner Cruise. Our group of old Chevies... and some others, drove up MacArthur til Bill Preston's 1957 Fuel Injected Corvette threw a rotor bug. We all pulled in around the old feed store at Edmond Road and all the guys helped get it going again!

At first they thought it was a fuel meter cable problem... No problem Bill and True Osborn BOTH had an extra one of those along!!! (What's the chance of that?) But as always, Curtis Welch – parts man extraordinaire – supplied the needed replacement rotor bug from his "back seat stash".

Thanks to Curtis, Larry, True and everyone else for the assistance. Bill had just rebuilt the injector after the car had sat idle for 3 years... so we're lucky that's all that went wrong. The Prestons and Myers took the Corvette home and picked up the not-much-more-reliable-but-air-conditioned 1956 Nomad to rejoin the tour later.

The group toured on up MacArthur, then over to Guthrie where we had our own private parking lot... or was it a retro used car lot?

The food at Granny Had One was great and the desserts were FABULOUS! The girls enjoyed the fabric store and antique shops nearby afterwards.

Rudy Escalera will host May's Dinner Cruise which will be Saturday, May 22. He has planned for us to meet at the Burger King, N.E. 23rd & I-35 at 2 p.m. We will take a 2 hr. cruise via back roads (*there will be a potty stop*) to Ben's BBQ in Seminole.

Upcoming Events

Bill Preston's Retirement Party, Thurs., May 13, 2-4:30 pm at Southern Nazarene Univ., Heritage Room, Webster Commons Bldg., 6612 NW 42nd St. Bethany. **You all come!**

6th Annual Cimarron Council of Boy Scouts Fundraiser Car Show, Sat., May 15th, 9 am-5 pm at Chisholm Trail Expo Center, Enid, OK. Pre-registration \$15. Contact (580) 234-3652.

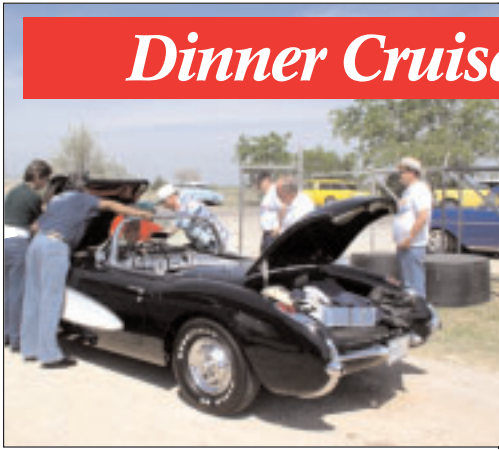
Darryl Starbird's Show at National Rod & Custom Car Hall of Fame Museum, June 4-6, 2004, Highway 85a & 125, Grand Lake, OK. For schedule and details go to www.darrylstarbird.com

COCCC-Snyder's Supermarket Show, Saturday, June 12, N.W. 23rd & Meridian, OKC. **Come out and support our own club's show!!!**

14th Annual Heartland Cruise, June 18-19, Weatherford, OK. Friday Street Dance, Cookout & Poker Run 7-11 p.m. Centennial Park. Saturday Car Show, Swap Meet, Craft Vendors, Saturday Night Route 66 Closed Cruise, Trophies & Drawings 4 p.m. Pre-registration \$20. Info (580) 772-7744.

1st Red Plains Car Show, Sat., June 19. Staging 7 am, Show 9 am-5 pm inside the Frisco Conference Center, Clinton, OK. Pre-registration & T-Shirt \$25. Contact Brandon Barton (580) 323-0799.

Dinner Cruise



MAR-K Tour



Mar-K owner, Mark Sharp, showing club members the various Classic Chevy interior stainless steel trim parts they manufacture.

Larry Myers & True Osborn in the assembly area, examining a reproduction 1932 Ford grill, which is one of Mar-K's most popular items. (They've produced more grills than Ford produced cars for it to fit... rodders love them.)



Mark Sharp outside the lumber curing room telling Don Bays and the group about the red oak used for pickup bed kits.

Bill Preston showing club members Annette Myers, Ruby Watt and Don Bays a stainless steel 55-57 Nomad slider window rear trim piece that Mar-K is manufacturing for him to resell.

Mark putting the final bend on the Nomad trim piece.

Our thanks to Mark and Kay Sharp for letting us use the meeting room at Mar-K Quality Parts for our April meeting. After the meeting Mark gave us a tour of the production facility where after-market parts are designed and produced for pickups and cars.

For a complete story about MAR-K see last month's issue of *Dashboard* or go online to MAR-K.com to view their on-line catalog and to get more information on their business and history.

After the meeting club members met at nearby Posado's Mexican Restaurant for dinner.



Our host Mark Sharp surrounded by Central Oklahoma Classic Chevy Club members and guests as he explains the uses of various pieces of manufacturing equipment used to make the after-market parts for pickups and cars.