

our opening
news and
reviews
compendium
edited by Kim
Williamson

ONEX HIT WITH 2002 LOSSES

Canadian conglomerate Onex Corp., parent of New York City-based exhibition giant Loews Cineplex Entertainment, has unveiled its financials for the 2002 fiscal year, indicating a sizable loss during the 12-month timeframe. Red ink from Loews' continuing operations totaled C\$145 million (US\$95 million), widening a bit from the previous year's C\$141 million (US\$92 million). Onex's net loss also equaled C\$145 million, vs. 2001's profit of C\$798 million (US\$521.6 million).

Also reported by the exhibition industry investor, which recently exited its plan to acquire the Landmark art-house circuit, was a drop in revenue; that tally tumbled from last year's C\$23.8 billion (US\$15.6 billion) to C\$22.7 billion (US\$14.8 billion). "2002 was a hard year," admits Onex chairman and chief executive Gerald Schwartz, who left LCE operations without any blame for results. "Especially hard hit were our businesses related to technology, telecommunications and building products." —*Francesca Dinglasan*

For Exhibition Briefings, see pages 53-58

CIRCUIT DISCRIMINATION SUIT DROPPED FOR APOLOGY

A discrimination suit that had been filed against an AMC Entertainment megaplex in Orange, Calif. was recently dismissed, according to court documents. California State Fullerton students Mohammad Sayed and Omar Zazia had filed a federal lawsuit against the AMC Block 30 several months ago, claiming that theatre employees had thrown the pair out of the venue for their seemingly Arab appearance and for speaking in the Afghan dialect of Pashto (see Hill News, November 2002).

Counsel for AMC, however, had denied the students' allegations, citing that one of the theatre employees involved in the ejection was himself Afghan-American. Court papers indicate that the litigants have accepted an apology from the theatre, with settlement documents stating that "defendants hereby apologize to plaintiffs for their respective roles in the events giving rise to the civil action."

Counsel representing the students, including an attorney from national rights watchdog the American Civil Liberties Union, are characterizing the settlement as a civil rights' triumph, but a legal representative for AMC told local reporters that the exhibition chain is in no way acknowledging any wrongdoing. According to the spokesperson, the company had chosen to issue the apology in lieu of an expensive court battle "for what would be a frivolous case." As part of the settlement, AMC was not required to pay financial damages to Sayed and Zazia. —*Francesca Dinglasan*

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MUVICO BUILDS NEW PLANTATION

Muvico Theaters, the nation's 20th largest theatrical circuit, recently announced plans to open 20 more screens in its home state of Florida. Muvico, which also operates theatres in Maryland and Tennessee, intends to unfurl a megaplex in the community of Plantation, with grand opening slated for the summer of 2004. In addition to anchoring shopping complex the Fashion Mall at Plantation, the cinema will include such amenities as wall-to-wall curved screens, Dolby digital sound systems and reclining seats. Upon the opening of the circuit's latest theatrical venture, Fort Lauderdale-based Muvico will operate 253 screens at 13 sites. —*Francesca Dinglasan*

For Local News, see pages 54-56

EVERYONE INTO THE THEATRE, THE WATER'S FINE

An £2 million cinema is being built on Banbridge, Northern Ireland's Victoria Street at the site of a former swimming pool. With one-fifth of the funding coming from the district council, local businessman Dominic Quinn will operate the four-plex; a Christmas bow is expected. —*Kim Williamson*

For EuroViews, see page 69

STOP THE MOVIE; JIMINY, IT'S CRICKET SEASON

They take cricket seriously in India. In the same week as a "funeral" procession complete with Ganga water and kholi rituals passed through the streets of Kolkata for an Indian team that had suffered a nine-wicket defeat at the hands of an Australian squad, the Rohini Theatre in hillstation Ooty cancelled all movies for 45 days, its screen devoted to cricket matches through late March. Rohini owner Sadiq Basha is using an LCD projector to display a cable network feed of the international competitions. Ticket price is Rs 10 per match, which can last 10 hours; an entertainment tax, usually 25 percent, has been cut by local officials to 10 percent. An early match between India and Holland drew just 150 patrons to the 875-seat cinema, but that tally beat attendance for some recent film releases. Basha expects interest to grow—if the Indian team can stroke some fourers. —*Kim Williamson*

For Pacific Overtures, see page 70

A NORTHERN BLIZZARD

A Sunday-morning robbery in early February at Famous Players' Colossus megaplex north of Toronto concluded with cash blizzarding across a major north-south route after the bandit began dropping money as he ran away. The thief was not caught, but the cash was, with police closing Highway 400 during retrieval. —*Kim Williamson*

For Northern Exposure, see page 68

DCI BACKS 2K STANDARD

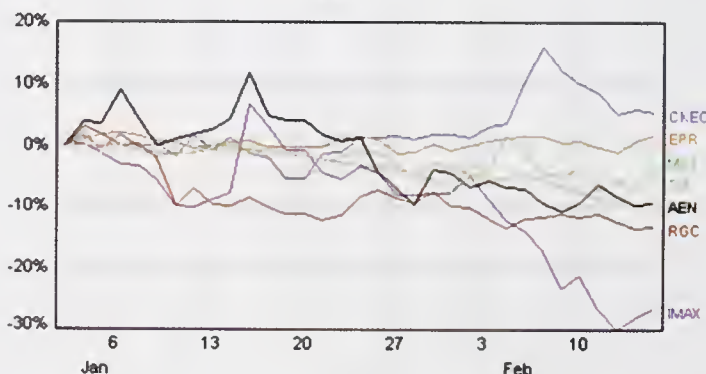
The Digital Cinema Initiative (DCI), the Hollywood studio-backed consortium that's been formed to set technological standards for digital cinema, has issued a preliminary draft of specifications for the technology. Only a few industry players had reviewed the confidential document by press time but, at a panel discussion at an annual technology retreat hosted by Hollywood Post Alliance, DCI chief technology officer Walt Ordway indicated that the group is leaning toward a resolution standard of at least 2K and perhaps as high as 4K.

The minimum figure is of a slightly higher resolution than what is currently being offered by high-definition video, which comes in at just under 2K, but substantially higher than the Texas Instruments-based systems installed in about 150 movie theatres worldwide. Industry insiders indicate, however, that TI has been developing a 2K-quality chip for its projectors. Meanwhile, the D-ILA technology developed by JVC and installed in Kodak digital cinema projectors can already generate 2K images.

Also at the gathering, attended by more than 230 executives and creatives involved in the development of the technology, it became clear that it will be important for digital cinema standards to be scalable, allowing the industry the flexibility to adapt to future innovation. According to comments made by panel moderator Charles Swartz, executive director and CEO of USC's Entertainment Technology Center, which hosts DCI's digital cinema laboratory, digital cinema hardware in the future could be modular and almost generic, with software and interfaces allowing for technological advances. At one time, it had been expected that digital cinema manufacturers would build expensive and closed (proprietary) systems. —*Annlee Ellingson*

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TICKER TIME: YTD 2003



Legend: AEN=AMC; CKEC=Carmike; EPR=Entertainment Properties Trust; IMAX=IMAX; MCS=Marcus; RGC=Regal; TLX=Trans-Lux.