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Cinema in Bantam sold

By: Rob Barry

As of Tuesday this week, Bantam's small, independent cinema changed ownership and gained new stewards who are looking to keep it running at its same high standards. The new owners, David Koch, his father, Sidney Koch and their friend Elizabeth Merz, are all Litchfield County residents who have frequented Bantam Cinema for years.

"We were honored to be asked to do this," said Mr. Koch of Spinning Reels LLC. Mr. Koch has been frequenting the Bantam for around 10 years. He said Lisa Hedley decided to end her 17-year ownership of the theater after the success of her new spa at The Mayflower Inn in Washington was preventing her from giving the cinema the attention it deserves.

Mr. Koch said loyal patrons need not worry; the new owners don't plan to change much.

"It's our main concern to keep this cinema operated as it always has been," said Mr. Koch.

Open since 1927, Mr. Koch says the Bantam is the longest running, continually operated cinema in Connecticut. The focus on art and independent films and the current employees will remain, and any changes to come will be for the purpose of enhancing the customer experience.

"Anything we can do to make the experience better for the moviegoer. After all, it's their cinema," said Mr. Koch. "We've been taking suggestions via e-mail. Even something like, 'more butter on the popcorn'-we listen to everything."

Mr. Koch said the new stewards may add a more spacious bathroom and bring in some healthier concession options, but they "intend to keep the same good programming."

Sheila Nevins, the wife of Sidney Koch, is a good friend of Ms. Hedley. The two collaborated in the documentary business for the production company Home Box Office.

"I would go there all the time," said Ms. Nevins. "I thought it was a kind of cultural oasis."

When Ms. Hedley put the cinema up for sale, Ms. Nevins said she was concerned it might be driven under like so many other small business in what she calls an increasingly corporatized world. She did not want to let that happen, she said.

"I don't know anything about running a movie theatre, but I'm trying to learn," said Ms. Nevins. "I know how to make movies, not sell tickets."

To keep updated by the weekly e-mail newsletter or send in suggestions, contact the stewards at BantamCinema@gmail.com. For show times, visit the Web site at www.BantamCinema.com

With a dedicated family and their friends Mr. and Mrs. Merz running the Bantam, the same quality of programming is expected to continue.

"And it's good because my son and I finally agree on something," said Ms. Nevins.



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