

MEDIA RELEASE

28 June 2015

SAVING SAWTELL CINEMA PEOPLE POWER SAVES 70+ YEAR OLD REGIONAL CINEMA

In most regional communities, access to the arts is limited. So it should surprise no one that Sawtell's small seaside community, 10k south of Coffs Harbour, came to cherish their art deco cinema. Opened in 1941 and run by the same family for three generations, the Sawtell Cinema served up quality art house film and family entertainment for decades, bringing joy (and a bit of culture) to locals and tourists alike.

Many mourned the loss when the cinema closed in December 2012, victim to the high cost of technological change. Fear was high that the cherished movie house would become yet another shop front or café on Sawtell's already crowded First Avenue.

But two years later, the community is buying the cinema back!

The campaign to Save Sawtell Cinema began when local resident Stephanie Ney registered for the School for Social Entrepreneurs in March 2014 with the express purpose of returning the Sawtell Cinema to the community. She successfully enrolled interested locals in her dream and a plan began to take shape.

"When I started talking to people about the idea of saving the cinema I was overwhelmed by offers to help. It seemed that the whole community was desperate for this to happen," says Stephanie.

Local accountant Denis Jeff had already been looking for ways to save the cinema when Stephanie approached him. He conceived the idea of establishing a property trust and worked tirelessly with Stephanie to seek out backers willing to stump up the cash to acquire the cinema.

A total of 19 people from the Coffs Coast region stepped forward to provide the necessary capital, and in December 2014 the group closed a contract to purchase the original building. When the development application (DA) for planned renovations was approved in March 2015, the sale was finalised and the cinema returned to the hands of the community.

Now that the building is safe, the focus is on renovations, due to commence in July 2015, and community involvement. "There's still so much to be done, but fortunately we are finding support in every pocket of the community," said Jill Nash, Chair of new owners Sawtell Cinema Pty Ltd.

An enormous groundswell of community support has buoyed the campaign to save Sawtell Cinema. Local designers and artists have contributed their time and

skills to assist in developing new designs in keeping with the cinema's heritage. The Facebook page got over 3000 likes within 48 hours of launching. The Open House and Auction day in May 2015 saw over 500 people return to the cinema to sit in the old seats again or buy a piece of cinema history.

This tremendous community love and support will be harnessed in July/August 2015 with the launch of the **Save Sawtell Cinema crowdfunding campaign**. Renowned movie critic David Stratton has agreed to be a patron for the campaign, acknowledging the national importance of regional cinema.

Designed to raise the over \$75,000 needed to purchase all new seating for the cinema, the campaign allows the entire community to be a part of saving this well loved icon. Rather than simply asking for donations, crowdfunding offers supporters rewards to recognise their valuable contribution to saving Sawtell Cinema.

The most sought after rewards are expected to be the chance to "own" a seat. Community members can have their own personal or company name etched into one of the Sawtell Cinema seats, or memorialise someone they love.

Those with grander ambitions can have their silhouette adorn the Sawtell Cinema foyer.

True cinema buffs will enjoy the chance to join David Stratton at the movies, or better still to share a private dinner with the critic and debate the qualities of their favourite films.

Rewards are available for every budget, with opportunities ranging from \$25 to \$5000. Those not game for the cost of the seat can share their love with an I Saved Sawtell Cinema bumper sticker or t-shirt. And those feeling particularly generous can pick up a night at the cinema for 40 of their closest friends, complete with drinks, nibbles and choc tops all round.

"What's most exciting about this entire project is the community spirit of love and support," said Jill Nash. "The crowdfunding campaign enables everyone who has ever loved this cinema to be a part of its rebirth."

The movement to save this decades-old, regional cinema demonstrates the power of a local community to shape its own destiny. It also demonstrates the importance of the arts in building vibrant and healthy regional communities.

All going to plan, the Sawtell Cinema is expected to reopen before Christmas.

**To support the Save Sawtell Cinema campaign go to:
www.chuffed.org/project/save-sawtell-cinema**