

# Family values rule at Cherry Bowl

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"Nostalgia" and "family" are the buzzwords at the Cherry Bowl Drive-In theater in Honor.

Between the 1950s atmosphere inherent in a retro-drive-in and the 1950s family values encouraged by owners Harry and Laura Clark, a trip to the Cherry Bowl is sure to feel like dropping into a time-warp.

Celebrating its golden anniversary this year, Cherry Bowl has been open every summer since it was

built in 1953. It has changed hands only once.

The Clarks have run the theater since they bought it from the original owners in 1997.

Before they embarked on the restoration and operation of Cherry Bowl, the Clarks operated a bakery in Frankfort, an endeavor that had slightly different business hours.

Instead of getting up at 3 a.m., the Clarks have to stay up until about that time now, since the second film of their double feature

often runs "long into tomorrow," said Harry Clark.

(Clark urges parents with small children not to worry: The film with the lower rating will always play first so families can get home at a reasonable hour.)

For the rest of the summer, Cherry Bowl will be open seven nights a week. Starting around dusk, they play two first-run movies every night.

However, not every big summer movie will appear at the drive-in. In keeping with their concept of the drive-in as a place for family fun, the Clarks only show movies with ratings of PG-13 or lower.

And even some PG-13 films don't make the cut. Clark said that although the "Austin Powers" movies technically had acceptable ratings, he didn't consider the films to be "family entertainment," so they didn't play at Cherry Bowl.

To give themselves an edge over air-conditioned multiplexes and to further

establish the drive-in as a haven of fun for the whole family, Cherry Bowl also features a miniature golf course, batting cages, a snack bar and a pet rest area.

As for the theater itself, Cherry Bowl does have some advantages over the original drive-ins of the '50s.

In addition to 300 vintage car speaker boxes that line the lot in front of the screen, visitors can listen to the movie on a low frequency FM station. An added bonus is that the capacity of the theater is flexible.

"We have a good amount of property, and we never have to turn anyone away," Clark said.

However, Clark added, it's a good idea not to wait until 10 minutes before the movie starts to show up. Some people arrive at Cherry Bowl before 7 p.m. to stake out their favorite spots.

*Cherry Bowl Drive-In is located at 9812 Honor Highway. Box office information is available at 325-3413.*

## The drive-in: past and present

The drive-in theater was invented in 1933 by Richard Hollingshead. Although his prototype was a crudely arranged theater on his property in Camden, N.J., the patented invention eventually became nationally celebrated.

In the late 1950s, at the peak of their popularity, there were more than 5,000 drive-ins in the U.S.

At that time, Michigan had 110 of the novelty theaters. Today, only 10 are still open.

As film technology and popular interests have changed, most drive-ins have gone out of business and are regarded as something of a fad, not unlike 3-D movies.

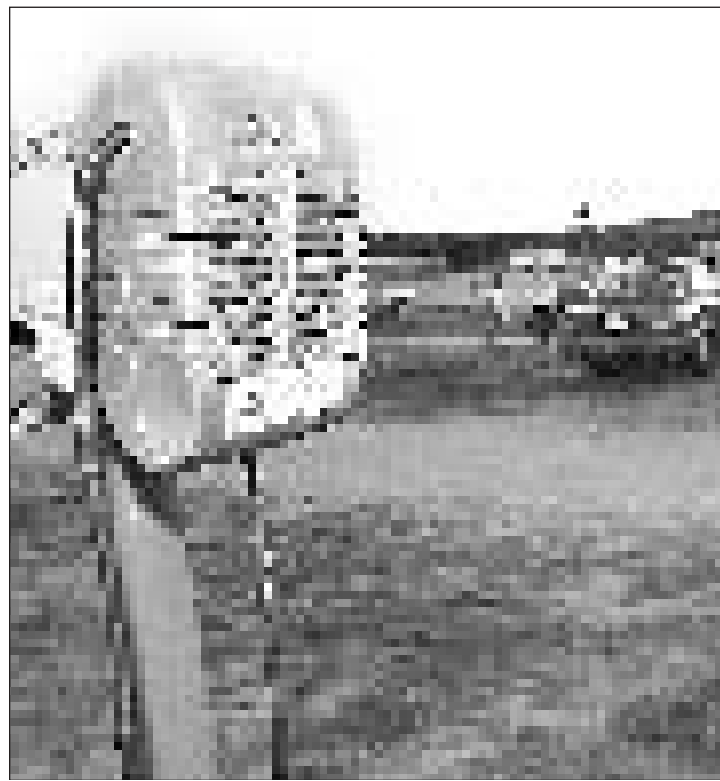
Easy alternatives for movie viewing such as the VCR, the DVD player, Pay-per-view movies and satellite dishes have only made the drive-in more obsolete, said Cherry Bowl Drive-In owner Harry Clark.

The current pace of family life also contributes to the dwindling popularity of drive-ins, Clark added. He said that with both parents working in many families and with kids having more extracurricular obligations than in years past, spending an entire evening at the drive-in is not a viable choice for many people.

"Kids are much busier, and family time has been reduced to a minimum," he said.



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Cherry Bowl Drive-In features vintage speaker boxes, but visitors can also listen to movie soundtracks on low frequency FM stations.