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Metro

Alamo Drafthouse to open near downtown Dallas next summer

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By **ROBERT WILONSKY** 

Staff Writer

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Downtown Dallas will once again have a nearby movie theater when an Alamo Drafthouse opens next summer in the Cedars neighborhood.

The two-story multiplex will be the first in or around downtown since a 10-screen theater in the West End went dark in 2000. It will have eight screens and seat around 1,000 moviegoers in a new building on the southwest corner of Cadiz and South Lamar streets.

“Downtown is coming back to life, and this is another indication of that,” said Jack Matthews, whose company Matthews Southwest will build and own the theater.

Mayor Mike Rawlings said the theater’s arrival in the Cedars “fans the flames of progress” downtown, in keeping with his two-year-old GrowSouth initiative that includes the revitalization of downtown and its adjacent neighborhoods.

“It’s exactly the strategy needed to grow southern Dallas,” he said. “You’ve got people five minutes away in Oak Cliff who are going to be able to use this. It’s not just a movie theater in downtown but for south of downtown.”

The theater will replace an empty building and parking lot on South Lamar, just a few blocks from where Matthews is building a mixed-use project with 280 apartments, ground-floor retail space and a parking garage. The vacant building, which briefly housed the Dallas

Music Complex in the mid-1990s, will be torn down, but the bricks will be reused for the Alamo construction.

The eight screens will have digital projectors augmented with Dolby 7.1 Surround Sound, and a handful will also be outfitted with 35 mm projectors. There will also be a second-story bar: the Glass Half Full Taproom, a craft beer and food lounge that will hold 200 and have two patios, one that will face downtown and another with a movie screen and a stage for live music.

Matthews said he and theater operator Bill C. DiGaetano first discussed planting an Alamo Drafthouse in the Cedars three years ago. At the time, DiGaetano said he expected to open four to six Alamo Drafthouse movie theaters throughout Dallas-Fort Worth, but until now there's been just one, in Richardson — a location that is doing far better than he expected.

“A lot of chains will look at us and go, ‘What are you doing?’” said DiGaetano, who owns the local rights to Alamo Drafthouse Cinema with his father, Bill D. DiGaetano. “But the demographic within 3 miles of the Cedars site and 3 miles of Richardson are identical when it comes to density and average incomes — and there are no theaters.

“We’re going to be able to pull in this great community in downtown and around downtown.”

Downtown Dallas Inc. says there are 8,000 people living inside the Interstate 30 loop, 40,000 living in the Cedars and 14 other districts surrounding downtown, and an additional 4,600 residential units planned in and around downtown. Adding such an entertainment venue makes the area that much more appealing, said John Crawford, president and CEO of Downtown Dallas Inc.

“This is a lights-camera-action banner thing for downtown as far as we’re concerned,” said Crawford, whose organization has been trying to lure a movie theater operator to downtown for years. “It’s just an enormous step forward not only for the growing critical mass downtown but provides yet another entertainment destination that draws folks back to the core.”

Ultimately, Matthews said, he hopes to see Lamar Street become “a place that’s active 24/7.” He envisions a day, perhaps as soon as next year, when “you’ve got people walking from downtown up and down the street. It will be heavily residential and heavily entertainment.”

DiGaetano says that right now he and Matthews haven’t asked the city to subsidize the Alamo Drafthouse Dallas. That could change, especially in light of Rawlings’ support.

“It’s a major part of GrowSouth,” the mayor said. “It shows the density is picking up and that those people have money and want to spend it in their neighborhoods. That’s the whole point of GrowSouth: This is an investment opportunity.”