

The Great Tidepool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA
by local award-winning author, [Brad Herzog](#)



SCREEN GEM

There was a moment last month, during the grand re-opening of Pacific Grove's beloved Lighthouse Cinema, when the significance of the occasion became crystal clear to me. It wasn't when the local TV stations set up camera to record the event. It wasn't when owner Sally Servidio wielded those cartoonishly oversized scissors for the ceremonial ribbon cutting. It wasn't even when a parade of young and old Pagrovians then marched into the theater on—what else?—a red carpet en route to *The Super Mario Bros. Movie*.

No, it was when I spotted one local waving to another who was walking by the building. "Hey!" he shouted to his friend. "My theater's reopening!"

My theater. Doesn't that say it all about the value of a small-town movie palace?

It is an increasingly endangered species. Since 2019, the total number of movie screens in the U.S. has decreased by nearly 10 percent. The Covid pandemic shut down theaters nationwide; many didn't survive. Meanwhile, streaming subscriptions have surged—Netflix, Hulu, Apple, Amazon—and the explosion of in-home options has transformed Hollywood's business model beyond even the impact of TV in the 1950s and VCRs in the 1980s. So you can imagine the effect it has had on mom-and-pop movie theaters.

Sally's father and uncle, Sal and John Enea, built Lighthouse Cinema at 525 Lighthouse Avenue in 1987, the latest in a string of Enea family movie houses that began generations earlier with silent films and vaudeville acts in Contra Costa County. Sal died a year after it was built, but Sally remembers her father's exhortation: "The show must go on." And it has, mostly, outlasting quite a few Monterey County theaters, but facing closure on and off, a bit like a flickering old silent film.



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When operator Santa Rosa Cinemas pulled out of a lease agreement in March, the theater abruptly shut its doors, but Sally and her two sisters vowed that the show must go on. So they're producing this new masterpiece themselves. They plan to innovate to survive—hosting local events and private parties, baking cookies onsite, serving beer and wine in the near future. Whatever it takes.

And I'm here to call on locals to do the same to support our small-town treasure. Whatever it takes. Because I believe a town needs a theater in the same way it needs a city hall or a post office or an everybody-knows-your-name watering hole. It is a link to a bygone era, a sanctuary on a frigid or (occasionally) sweltering day, a gathering spot, a setting allowing a fantastical escape.

A multiplex in a mall can flex its muscle, but it lacks a certain character, a comforting charm. Sharing a moviegoing experience with your friends and neighbors—in a building that feels very much like a local landmark—is about more than the film. When the lights dim and the coming attractions begin, we're a community bonding over artistry, a small town celebrating the big screen.

So let's aim for another 36 years of Lighthouse Cinema. See you at the movies...

*The Great
Tidepool*



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