


# HELLO, DIGITAL!

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THE CATLOW THEATER, WHICH WAS  
DESIGNATED AS A NATIONAL REGISTER  
OF HISTORIC PLACES IN 1989,  
IS OWNED BY TIM O'CONNOR AND  
ROBERTA RAPATA.

A LANDMARK THROUGHOUT BARRINGTON'S PAST 85 YEARS, 1927's Catlow Theater was destined to permanently enter the archives of time, becoming extinct, unless something drastic happened to change the course of its future. Production studios sent out the word that there would be no more distribution of film-based movies. The Catlow's capabilities were 100 percent film. Going forward, if a movie theater wasn't digital, it wasn't going to exist.

Catlow owners Tim O'Connor and Roberta Rapata, who also own Boloney's Sandwich Shop that adjoins the theater, were weighing their options. They had bought the Catlow in 1988 from then-retiring Ed Skeahn, after owning Boloney's since 1981, with money borrowed from friends and family. It was going to cost about \$100,000 to go digital. Movie theaters all across our country were in the same dilemma. O'Connor and Rapata didn't want to raise additional funds from their first source, and they didn't want to go to the bank – both options would result in the cost of theater tickets going up and the \$5 ticket is one of the Catlow's big draws. They couldn't think of any other options.

That is, until O'Connor read about Kickstarter.com while waiting for a dental appointment. Kickstarter is the #1 Internet fundraising platform for creative projects. It's ambitious and innovative in the way that it helps people reach out to their community and raise funds for projects ranging from a nonprofit that creates a photography exhibit, to a musical band producing a CD. In return for funds, the benefactor gives something back. For example, if you helped a band raise funds to create a CD, they'll let you name a song, or for the right price, they'll even write one just for you.

Kickstarter, which was launched in 2009, has had more than 2.5 million people pledge over \$350 million, funding more than 30,000 creative projects.

O'Connor started doing his research, but was frustrated because the Catlow didn't fall squarely into one of Kickstarter's categories. He attended the online Kickstarter School and learned everything that he could about their process and, eventually, he watched Chicago's Patio Theater successfully go through the process.

O'Connor explained all that he had learned to Rapata, and her response was three simple words: Go for it. Together, they envisioned using the technology of Kickstarter to reach back in time to all those who had loved the Catlow over the years, and engage them in the process of propelling the Catlow into the future.

O'Connor contacted Jeff Doles, a video production teacher at Barrington High School. For years, O'Connor had given the BHS video department a venue to show their projects, and this time he asked for a favor in return. The students created a video and together, with instrumental music help from friend Tim Streff, and creative words by a media relations friend Charlie McBarron, the video clip ran front and center on the Catlow's Kickstarter page. O'Connor used the Catlow's website and Facebook page to spread the word. It spread like wildfire.







While sitting at a table in Boloney's, O'Connor shook his head and said out loud, "I'm flabbergasted. I'm running out of words. Roberta and I put so much time into the Catlow and Boloney's, we hadn't even had the time to get married. We've been engaged since 1981. When we opened up the Catlow, neither one of us had ever owned a movie theater or even worked at one. We just followed our hearts. If someone forgot their money, we'd give them a ticket and they could come back the next day to pay up. If someone needed a ride home we gave them one, because Barrington didn't have a cab company.

"Roberta and I have been texting each other constantly," O'Connor said. I sleep with my iPhone under my pillow and I wake up all night long looking at it. At one point I had my laptop set up next to my iPhone, and whenever we would receive a new backer, I would receive an email which was announced with a pinging sound. My laptop and iPhone were going off so much it sounded like a game of ping pong. I have to say that if it weren't for the Internet, we'd be out of business."

And while sitting right next to him, Rapata could be heard speaking words akin to the famous Sally Fields Academy Awards speech, "I thought



no one noticed, but now I know that they like us, they really like us."

"I've been getting calls from all over the country as other theaters just like us are up against the same challenges," O'Connor said. "I've figured it out, and I feel an obligation to help out as many people as I can. We'll see if we can make a difference."

### CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

The marquee has been cleaned and painted and it shines brightly on Main Street. And future changes include "state-of-the-art digital equipment, that's for sure" says O'Connor. He adds, "In fact, we'll be well-equipped to take the Catlow through the next phases of digital growth. Some of our movies will come to us on a hard drive, and some

will come to us through a satellite dish that will be installed."

Other updates are in the works according to O'Connor: "Some of our seats will need to be replaced, but we're keeping a good portion of the old ones because so many people tell us that they love our seats. Some people want to buy the seats where they had their first dates. The size of the ladies room has been a running joke forever, so that will be enlarged. And we're pretty sure we'll be getting a new furnace. You should see the dinosaur that we have in the basement.

Other changes are in order too, but we're going to listen to our patrons before we make any other decisions." U



Susan McConnell is a writer and photographer who has been going to the Catlow since 1980.



Film over: The movie's heavy film reel was placed on a horizontal platter. The strip of film was fed through the projector and brought back to rewind on an empty reel that was set on another platter. The projection room is a cluttered workshop that now represents a bygone era with its tools and instruction notes to fix the equipment, and pieces of tape to patch broken film.

## WHAT THE CATLOW IS GIVING BACK

In order to go into the future, O'Connor and Rapata were going to need to go back in time, relying on the Catlow's historic connection to Barrington and the people who now live here or have lived here. And they were fully prepared to give back to their funders. Here's is a list of what will be offered for kicking in funds:

- \$75 and below: you receive various combinations of movie tickets, popcorn and drinks; funded by 724 backers.
- \$100 donated: you receive dinner and a Movie Special for Four. You get dinner from Boloney's and movie tickets for four, plus popcorn and drinks, plus an invitation to the soon-to-be-infamous digital premiere; funded by 316 backers.
- \$250 given: you receive The Silver Reel Reward – 2 one-year movie passes, plus popcorn and drink during each movie visit; funded by 116 backers.
- \$500 given: you receive The Gold Reel Reward – 2 two-year movie passes, plus popcorn and drink during each movie visit; funded by 26 backers.
- \$1,000 given: you receive The Platinum Reel Reward - your photograph memorialized in the lobby, plus 10-year-long movie passes, plus popcorn and drink during each movie. Additionally, you get an invitation to the soon-to-be-infamous digital premiere; funded by 4 backers.
- \$2,000 given: you receive The Diamond Studded Reel Reward. You get to be the guest projectionist for the night; funded by 4 backers.
- \$5,000 you receive Roberta's Reward. You get to have a private movie party for up to 200 people, complete with free bottomless popcorn and free bottomless drinks; funded by 4 backers.

In all, there were 1,394 backers of the Catlow's Kickstarter project. O'Connor and Rapata raised \$100,000 in less than seven days, and by the end of 60 days, they had raised \$175,395. The project was 175 percent funded.

## CATLOW'S HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE

- The Catlow was built on West Main Street in 1926. The theater was primarily designed in the Tudor Revival style and ornamented to portray a medieval English hall.
- The architectural firm of Betts & Holcomb of Chicago designed the theater; the builder was T.S. Willis of Janesville, Wisc.
- The theater's grand opening was held on Wright Catlow's birthday, May 28, 1927.
- The main historical highlight of the Catlow Theater is the interior design by renowned sculptor and designer, Alfonso Iannelli, whose career started to gain momentum in Los Angeles where he designed posters for the Orpheum Vaudeville Theater from 1910 to 1915. During this time, Iannelli became friends with architect Barry Byrne and brothers, John and Lloyd Wright, the sons of Frank Lloyd Wright.



# WHY WE LOVE THE

Several long-time Barrington residents share stories of what inspired them to support efforts to save The Catlow.

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## SHARON CLIFFORD

I grew up in Fox Point and we used to ride our bikes to the Catlow and there was no traffic. We didn't even need to lock our bikes. The velvet seats were the best you could find. I saw my first R-rated movie at the Catlow, *Magic*, and I received my first kiss.



## DR. JACK NOYES

Back in 1935, I was six years old and *Gunga Din* scared the hell out of me! I ran all the way home. When I was older, my friends and I, we'd start to feel like we owned the place and we'd get all relaxed and put our feet up on the seats in front of us. Wright Catlow would grab us by the scruff of our necks and make us sit in the office till the movie was over. Wright Catlow didn't put up with anything. He ran a tight ship.

## BILL NOYES

I used to go to the Catlow with my friends all the time. When we were in middle school and high school it was the place to go on a date. I have great memories.

## JACK NOYES

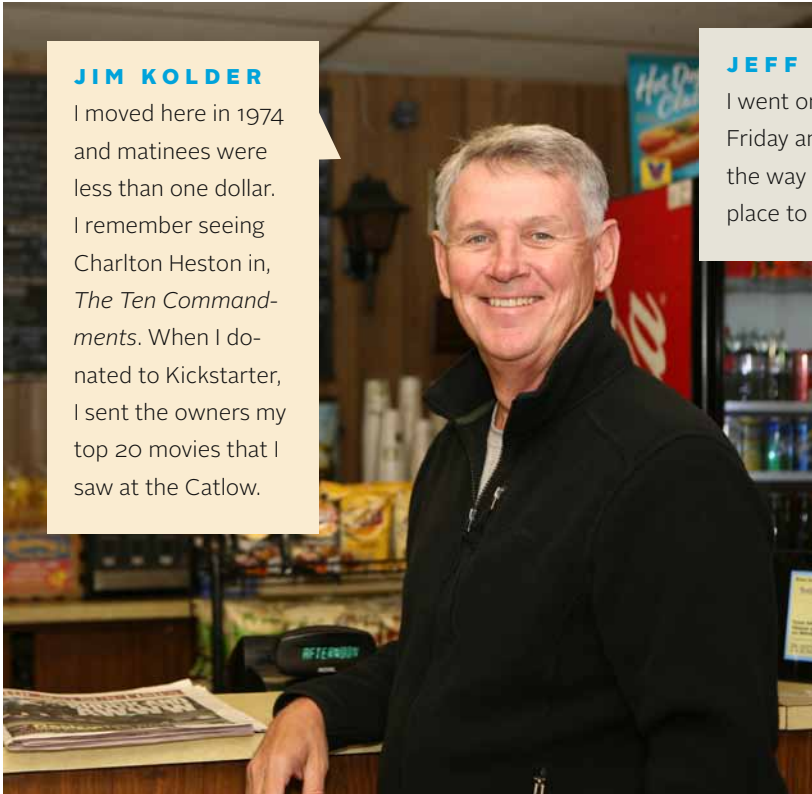
When I was a kid, my parents used to drive me here with my cousins, Billy and Tyler. It was a part of our family history.

## MIMI NOYES BURKE

We used to ride our bikes into town to the matinee ... like, *Godzilla vs. King Kong* and the classics like, *Gone With The Wind* and *True Grit*. I also saw the *Exorcist* here and kept my head hidden for the most part. The Catlow is a piece of our history. I donated, as did my Dad. When you look at the outpouring of support you can see the importance of the Catlow's presence in our town."

**JIM KOLDER**

I moved here in 1974 and matinees were less than one dollar. I remember seeing Charlton Heston in, *The Ten Commandments*. When I donated to Kickstarter, I sent the owners my top 20 movies that I saw at the Catlow.



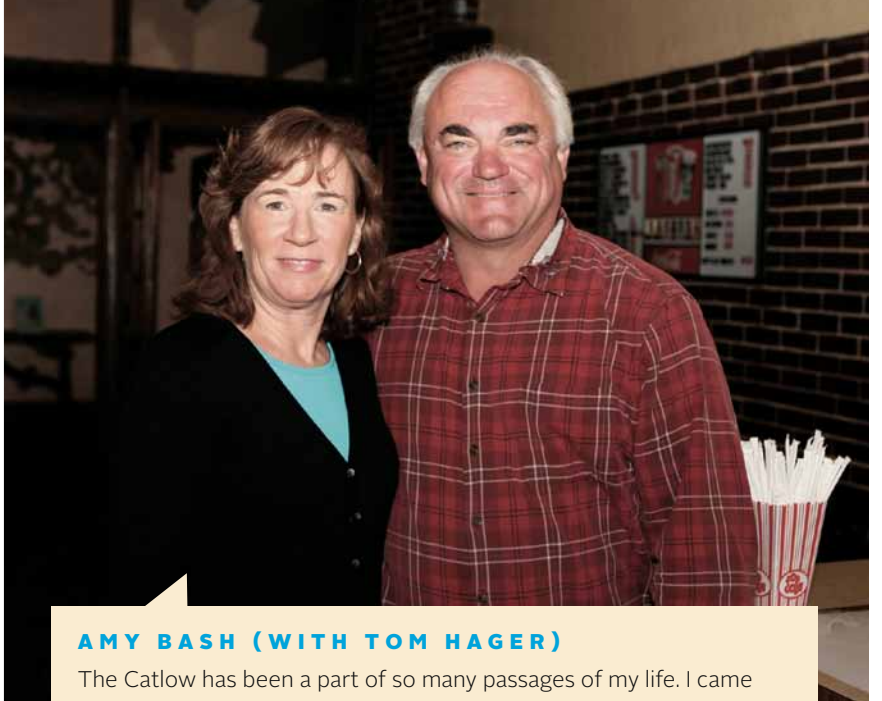
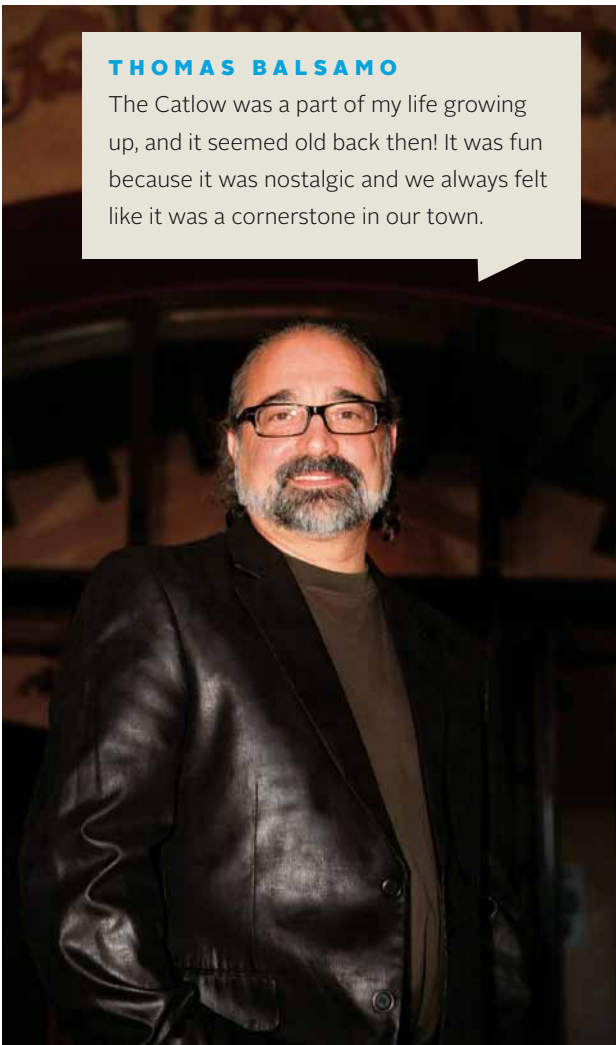
**JEFF ANDERSON**

I went on my first date here in 7th grade and we went to a matinee. On Friday and Saturday nights the line was so long we would have to go all the way down the alley. We rode our bikes here and it was just a great place to meet your friends. Still is. It's the centerpiece of our town.



**THOMAS BALSAMO**

The Catlow was a part of my life growing up, and it seemed old back then! It was fun because it was nostalgic and we always felt like it was a cornerstone in our town.



**AMY BASH (WITH TOM HAGER)**

The Catlow has been a part of so many passages of my life. I came here when I was little, with my parents, and it's where I saw my first movie, *The Sound of Music*. As a teen, we met friends here and we'd see half the town. And then I brought my kids here to introduce them to the Catlow. The landscape of Barrington has changed, but the Catlow remains the same, beautiful and filled with history. I also had my first date here and remember spilling a big bucket of popcorn on my lap.





## HELLO TO OUR BARRINGTON KICKSTARTER BACKERS!

A MERE "THANK YOU" DOESN'T EVEN BEGIN to express how thankful we are for your outpouring of support. It was astonishing to see the town rally behind the Catlow during our recent fundraiser drive. You have earned the rewards given in exchange for your donations, but your real rewards go beyond the tangible. Several independent theaters across the nation are facing extinction because of the forced changeover to digital projection. You not only saved the Catlow from this dilemma, you have also given hope to countless small theater owners looking for their own solution. You have been the answer to our prayers and we wish the same for all the other theaters finding themselves in the same situation.

The donations literally poured in from around the world thanks to Kickstarter's global reach, but it was apparent that the bulk of our backing came from Barrington's own. Whether still residing in the area or now living abroad, you all helped to spread the word locally and online. The local media helped to spark interest, then Facebook, Twitter, and the entire Internet were alive with Barringtonian calls for support from their friends, families, neighbors and fellow school alumni.

In less than a week, you managed to help us meet our digital conversion funding goal. On top of that, you asked what else it would take to keep the Catlow thriving for future generations, and then set us up with the funds to make more vital repairs and improvements.

All of that was, in itself, quite amazing, but to personally hear the many Catlow memories you all hold so close to your hearts was endearing. Stories of romance, family, friends and other personal moments came flooding in through email, regular mail, phone calls and personal visits. There is so much love out there for the Catlow – who knew?

Well, now we know!

The Catlow is more than just Roberta and me. Our silent partners, Carl Rauchenberger, Art Rice, and Karen Buzek are just as committed to preserving the Catlow's future as we are. One of the main reasons we banded together to purchase the Catlow was to keep it from falling victim to the theater-splitting craze that was so popular back in the late 1980s. We all wanted to be certain that the historic integrity of the theater would remain intact.

We have always believed that the Catlow could survive as a single-screen theater in this age of large chain theaters and multiplexes because of its importance to the community. Slicing the interior in two would have destroyed Alfonso Iannelli's vision for how the interior should complement the entire structure. Although it is becoming increasingly harder to fill 700 seats these days, we believe that our new improvements will help us see our attendance rise to sustainable levels again.

We have a great deal of respect for, and owe many thanks to, our loyal patrons who have carried us through some lean years and who have never given up on us. At the same time, we understand that having our film projectors break down, hearing the sound echoing all over the interior, and trying to cope with our ancient facilities have turned others off and kept them away. We hope that this 'kickstart' to our rejuvenation effort will inspire you to give the Catlow another chance.

You will be able to see and hear movies like never before at the Catlow. You will experience the latest state-of-the-art equipment. You will enjoy the comforts provided by the building repairs which are now possible. We have dreamed of this day for years. Now, because of your belief in us and thanks to your support, we are finally able to achieve that dream! You can already see that dream materializing when you see the fresh face on our vertical sign and marquee. It will still be the same Catlow that you know and love, we will just be able to compete on a more even keel using today's modern technology as required by Hollywood.

The Catlow is about to enter the new digital age because you love our theater as much as we do.

Thanks to your support, one of the icons of our past will remain part of the future. We can't wait!

—TIM & ROBERTA