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New, bigger movie theater in the works

The Cullman Times

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Sherrie Ashley of Goldridge had to take her son to Decatur last year to see the movie "Drumline." Having only three movie screens in Cullman means a lot of films she and her family would like to see never make it here.

But that will change soon. Carmike Cinemas Inc. has revealed plans for a 10-screen, stadium-seating movie theater in Cullman. The announcement was made by Carmike and Drinkard Development Inc. of Cullman. Roy H. Drinkard and Bill Drinkard made the deal with Fred Van Noy, chief operating officer for Columbus, Ga.-based Carmike.

"This is a great opportunity for the community," Kirk Mancer, president of the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce, said. "It will continue to improve the quality of life for the community. This is positive growth for the Cullman area that we welcome."

The site won't be determined until later. Roy Drinkard, president and founder of Drinkard Development, said the theater will be built on property his company already owns. Though he didn't specify, that could mean either Town Square Shopping Center, where the current Carmike theater is, or across the highway at the old Wal-Mart site. Van Noy will be in Cullman next month to announce the location to the public. When the new theater opens, Town Square 3 will be closed.

"Carmike has a long-standing relationship with its patrons in Cullman and the surrounding areas, and the new state-of-the-art, stadium seating, 10-screen complex will enhance that relationship," Van Noy said. "Carmike is dedicated to bringing its patrons the best movie-going experience possible and will continue to do so with its new 10-screen theater."

"This will give us more choices and a lot more variety," said Ashley, who has three children ages 18, 9 and 5.

Jennifer DeBoer of Cullman said she and her family go to the movies about six times a year, but probably would go more often if they had more choices. She hopes Carmike might offer a special family night one night a week with a reduced admission charge to make it more affordable.

Carmike has operated Town Square 3 since 1979.

"This will be the continuation of a more than a 25-year relationship," Roy Drinkard said.

Drinkard Development is Carmike's landlord in cities in Alabama, Tennessee and



This architect's rendering depicts the 10-screen theater Carmike Cinemas Inc. has planned for Cullman.

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Kentucky.

"We are dedicated to giving Carmike the finest facilities possible and a place that will make the people of Cullman proud," Drinkard said.

This will be the first time Drinkard Development has a deal for the new stadium-seating theaters Carmike is building now, Drinkard said, but the Cullman company is exploring four other locations with Carmike for similar theaters.

"We're working with Carmike's architects, and the layout of Cullman will be similar to Carmike's multi-screened theater at the Summit in Birmingham," Drinkard said.

Carmike would like to have the theater opened in early spring of 2005, "but we hope to have it completed in time for the holiday season this year," Drinkard said.

"I'm very excited about this type of facility," Sammie Danford, interim director of economic development for the Cullman County Commission, said, "in addition to the economic impact it brings to the Cullman area. Drinkard Development continues to do an outstanding job in the recruiting effort."

Mancer said the theater will help city and county officials in their recruitment of new industry, because it will show prospects that the city has more to offer the company's workers and administrators.

"We're moving forward," Mancer, who started his job in January, said. "This is a positive thing for the entire community."

The 10-screen theater will include state-of-the-art stadium seating -- high back plush seating with retractable armrests equipped with cup holders. Stadium seating offers moviegoers unobstructed sight lines to view the screen.

Each theater in the complex will include wall-to-wall screens and digital sound. There will be advance ticketing sold at the box office and on-line at www.fandango.com. The lobby area will be spacious with flanking concession stands.

Carmike Cinemas Inc. is a premiere motion picture exhibitor in the United States with 291 theater locations and 2,219 screens in 35 states, as of Feb. 27. Carmike's focus for its theater locations is small- to mid-sized communities across the United States. More than 80 percent of its theaters are located in communities with populations of fewer than 100,000. For more information visit Carmike Cinemas' Web site, www.carmike.com.

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