

# The Dedham Times

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## **The theatre where everyone knows your name and they're always glad you came**

This year's Best Picture winner provides a boost for a local gem

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By Rich Trombetta

Four lifelike figurines, each about 12 inches high, are displayed on a shelf behind the concession stand at the Dedham Community Theatre. Just as with the chandelier in the foyer, the miniature statues could be expensive collectables made of fine porcelain or cheap knock-offs created from plastic, shipped to the US from a factory in China. It's hard to tell. Three employees are dressed in black pants, black polo shirts, and white T-shirts, looking more like Catholic priests congregating before Mass instead of workers preparing to sell popcorn, candy, or even a cup of coffee from the pot that rests on an older-style coffee maker and looks like a castoff from the police station across the street.

"I say it's Cary Grant," says the theatre manager, noting that the other three are W.C. Field and Laurel and Hardy. "No one really knows for sure. They were a donation from a guest years ago."

While the Dedham Community Theatre shows mostly independent movies (if you wanted to catch recent Best Picture winner "Parasite" the theatre was your best local option) it is more reminiscent of the TV show Cheers, where everyone knows your name and they are always glad you came. Unlike the large megaplexes that seem to dominate today's movie experience, this theatre is different. There's a reason community in its name.

The manager excuses himself as two customers approach the counter. "Hey! Good to see you again," he says to the middle-aged man and woman beaming with enormous smiles as they scan the candy counter, contemplating whether this is a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup or Junior Mint type of night.

He takes his post behind a waist-high, white podium with caster wheels and peeling veneer, his arms behind his back like a sailor standing at attention on the deck of a ship coming into port. His demeanor becomes more relaxed and jovial with each ticket holder who approaches. “Hi.” “Great to see you.” “Thanks for coming.” “How’s the leg?” You are half expecting him to yell “Norm!” as he makes this transactional exchange into a series of personal connections with people who, even if he has never met them, seem like they are neighbors or family friends.

The popcorn machine makes a loud humming noise, almost as if it’s announcing that a fresh batch is on the way. The buttery smell engulfs the lobby, its scent conjuring up memories of a Jiffy Pop popcorn tin expanding on a hot kitchen stove as Mom or Dad holds your hand while you shake the metal container on a hot burner for Saturday family movie night. Pop pop pop. Just as at home, people gather close and watch the kernels magically transform into a treat that has become synonymous with movies. A concession worker dips an eight-inch, thin soup ladle into a bowl of warm melted butter, pouring it gently - no, elegantly - over a cup of popcorn like a French pastry chef adding the final touches to a creme brulee.

Just before the movie begins an elderly man in his 70s shuffles through the lobby, his feet almost stumbling on the razor thin wall-to-wall carpet. “I heard David is back,” he says as he hands his ticket to a staff member. “Yup,” the staff member says enthusiastically. “I’ll tell him you were here.”

The big megaplexes may have recliner seats and more movie choices but they are impersonal, stale and, in a way, the antithesis of what this small independent theatre has to offer - community. While fancy leather seats may be nice, sometimes you just can’t beat going where everyone knows your name – and they’re glad you came. Oh, and you might just see an Academy Award winning film while you’re there.

*Dedham Community Theatre is located at 580 High Street in Dedham, MA. Their web site is [www.DedhamCommunityTheatre.com](http://www.DedhamCommunityTheatre.com)*