

The (Almost) Closing of the Saco Drive-In



By Renee Dutremble
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Locals were saddened to hear that the Saco, Maine drive-in was possibly going to have to be shut down after over 80 years in business. This was especially devastating for many of their movie-goers because of the history that the theater withheld.

The Saco drive-in is the third oldest drive-in in the country, and is only one of six theaters that remain open in the state of Maine. They first opened in 1939 and have been under the same owners since 1986.

Not only did the theater show nightly double features, but they were a host spot for many other events such as giving the class of 2020 from Biddeford high school a place to hold their graduation in a safe manner during difficult Covid times.

However, on February 28, 2022, the drive-in property was sold by its owners to Hale Trailer Brake & Wheel, the largest independent trailer dealership in North America.

In regards to the sale, the Drive-In shared a post on Facebook that read, “The past 2 years have been a challenge. Owning the property since 1986, selling the drive-in was one of the hardest decisions we had to make. Covid played a part in our decision from having to operate at reduced capacity, inconsistent supply chains, staffing shortages, movie shortages and online streaming to name a few. It has been our pleasure serving you and appreciate everyone who supported us. Thank you!”

Owner, Patricia Roberge, shared her own personal emotions saying that she had “mixed feelings” about selling the drive-in after owning it for 35 years. She knew that it was special for her and her family to have owned it for as long as they did, but expresses her sadness through a statement claiming, “It was a difficult decision just knowing we were going to disappoint a lot of people by closing,” but including, “We hope people will remember making memories with their families watching movies under the stars.”

After many years filled with nostalgia and memories, numerous locals were devastated to hear this news. Zowie Cheetham-Wilmot, a frequent customer at the Drive-In, says that she was saddened to hear about the closing after having made so many memories there. She expresses some of her favorite memories with her friends such as watching many movies while munching on concession stand snacks, and her favorite, a Girl Scout weekend with food trucks and other fun activities. “It felt as though we were going to lose the place of many fun nights,” says Cheetham-Wilmot.

Luckily for customers like her, a nearby business saw how many people this was impacting and took action in hopes to keep the prized business alive.

Aquaboggan, a water park located directly across the street from the Drive-In, posted on Facebook only a month after the closing, announcing that they are “bringing the Drive-In back to Saco!” They went on to explain that they are currently working with the City of Saco in an attempt to get city permits that would allow for them to revive the Saco Drive-In on their own property. They state that they are “doing everything [they] can to keep this local icon thriving for generations to come... and are committed to preserving as much history as possible in the process.” As the history is so important to both the owners and customers, many were happy to hear this statement and are excited to see what happens in the future.

With such a close location, customers will not have trouble finding the Drive-In’s new spot. General Manager of Aquaboggan, Ethan Mongue, voices his excitement as he grew up attending double features at the drive in himself. Mongue shares his feelings about the pairing of the two companies stating how the park closes around five or six and adding how it is “perfect timing to get it shut down and open up a drive-in.” He also provides the fortunate information of how the new buyers of the Drive-In land were willing to sell the iconic sign to Aquaboggan, keeping the essence of the space alive.

Though many changes are happening, it is clear that everyone involved is in support of keeping as much history as possible and creating the same joyous space, knowing that is what the previous owners are hoping for. Roberge voices that she hopes Aquaboggan is able to go through with these plans and keep the legacy alive for many years to come. She knows how many people were thrilled by the news and just hopes that people can continue enjoying the outdoor theater for as long as possible.

“We couldn't be happier for them and wish them all the best,” Roberge remarks.