

Past dimmed by Theater's renovation

By Nancy Ellis

Sipping a cocktail in the quiet half-light of a Lincoln bar called Barrymore's is reminiscent of the backstage of a theater.

A contrast of old and new. Rustic brick walls and a glass and chrome enclosure, which houses leafy plants, seems to climb the shadowy walls. The eye leaves the new behind and searches for the old, which is hidden away in the shrouded recesses of a sky-high ceiling.

The luxuriant green foliage points like fingers to the mysterious expanse of catwalks, ropes, curtains and lights. Remnants of the Stuart Theater as it was in the 1930s remind patrons of Barrymore's that they are sitting on an old stage.

This reminiscence is exactly what the designer and architect of Barrymore's, 124 N. 13 St. wanted customers to feel because a backstage area is what Barrymore's was originally.

June 10, 1929, marked the opening date of the Stuart Theater, a building that Lincoln architect Bob Hanna said was "the second best building in Lincoln," architecturally speaking, next to the state Capitol.

THE STUART THEATER is no longer the ornately decorated structure its architect, the late Ellory Davis Sr., constructed. On April 30, 1972, it was remodeled.

"Had Ellory Davis Sr. been alive, the Stuart Theater would still be intact," Hanna said.

Seven years ago, Hanna headed the "Save the Stuart Committee," which unsuccessfully fought against the \$100,000 remodeling project undertaken by the Stuart's new leaders, the Dubinsky Brothers Theater Co.

The Dubinsky's, who own a chain of Midwestern motion picture theaters, leased the theater from members of the Stuart family, who chose to remodel for economic reasons.

Before the Stuart was remodeled, movies weren't big money-making ventures like they are today, Hanna said. Theaters all over the country were losing money and were being reduced in structural size as well as in seating capacity.

"Now, I bet they'd like to have the 2,000 seats that were in the Stuart before," Hanna said. Today, the Stuart has a seating capacity of 917.

THE 40-YEAR-OLD NATIVE-Nebraskan said he pledged never to step foot into the Stuart if it was remodeled, and he hasn't.

"Think of all the good movies I've missed," Hanna added.

Hanna has, however, been in Barrymore's, which, he said, is a "by-product of the Stuart Theater."

Barrymore's is the backstage and a portion of the main stage of the Stuart. The idea for preserving some of the theater's original elegance came from owner and co-designer, Jim Haberlan. Haberlan hired another Lincoln architect, David Meyer of Geller Design, to help design and build the bar.

Meyer said, "We wanted to restore the backstage area after what had been done to the main theater."

The space for Barrymore's, which was subleased from the Dubinsky's, had not been used for about 25 years, said Meyer, a UNL graduate.

Restoration of the old backstage began Sept. 1, 1974, and Barrymore's opened for business in mid-November of that year, Meyer said.

A number of structural changes were made by the Dubinsky's in what is now the movie house portion, Meyer said.

"Many people, including myself, were upset about the remodeling," he added.

At the time of the restoration, the Dubinsky's assured people that the Stuart was not being permanently changed. But, Meyer said, he seriously doubts that.

SEVERAL ITEMS damaged or sold during the Dubinsky remodeling are irreplaceable, Hanna said.

The only way restoration of the Stuart could come about today would be if it became a public project, Hanna said. Four years ago, businessmen in Omaha bought and restored the lobby of the Orpheum Theater which, Hanna said, is comparable to the Stuart in value.

Restoration of the backstage portion of the Stuart was not an expensive project like the Omaha Orpheum, 32-year-old Meyer said.

"We were careful to keep everything that was there."

The finishing of the backstage was not as elaborate as the front areas, Meyer said, so highly expensive materials didn't have to be used.

Further restoration included cleaning and mending of curtains, scrubbing the walls and carpeting the wooden floor which, Meyer said, was beyond repair. The old dressing rooms were converted into bathrooms, he added.

"We started from the top and worked down."

The seven-story high ceiling was kept because of "its appeal," he said. If another business would have bought the backstage area, Meyer said, it probably would have put up an eight-inch acoustical ceiling and no one would have recognized the place as the backstage of the Stuart Theater.

The only new items that were added to the original backstage were a bar, tables, chairs and a large glass enclosure, which covers part of one wall and is filled with plants, Meyer said.

A restoration project like Barrymore's isn't something an architectural firm normally does, Meyer said, but "we carried it out well."



Daily Nebraskan Photo

Barrymore's, 124 N. 13th St., becomes a remnant of history as a bar that was converted from the architecturally-famed Stuart Theater.

Answering phone big money for bookies

By Mike Sweeney

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Editor's note: This is the second in a three-part series on campus football gambling.

The sound of footsteps in the hall preceded a tapping at the door of a small second-story room at a UNL fraternity Thursday evening.

The door slid open and two men stepped in.

"How about those Chargers?" said the first. "Give me \$5."

"I want Oakland," said the second. "I hope the Snake has a hell of a game tonight."

The student who calls the small, dimly-lit room home during the school year has just made 50 cents. Oscar (not his real name) will make about \$20 before the night is over, recording illegal bets on looseleaf sheets torn from a spiral notebook.

Bookmaking often requires long hours by the telephone, but the pay is great, Oscar said. He said he handles between \$600 and \$1,000 every weekend and keeps five percent.

The only talent a bookmaker needs is an ability to intimidate gamblers who are late paying off their bets, he said.

"You've got to make sure and threaten those bastards," he said.

To Allen (also a pseudonym), gambling is "just like another job. I go to a lot of effort to make sure and do it right."

Allen, a former UNL student, handles thousands of dollars in illegal bets every

week, although he won't reveal exactly how much he makes.

"A PERSON would be surprised at how much gambling goes on," he said.

"I've never understood why it's illegal. I think it's socially acceptable, it's just not legally acceptable," he said.

He said his customers include businessmen, friends and UNL students. About 20 percent of his business comes from UNL, he said, and includes women as well as men.

Thursday evening, Allen's customers placed nearly \$2,000 worth of bets on a National Football League game—\$1,100 on one team and \$880 on the other. After calling in the \$220 difference to another bookmaker, he was assured of making \$80 regardless of the game's outcome.

Oscar said bookmakers try to even the total amounts bet on both teams to ensure a profit.

Here's how the system works:

A gambler who wants to place a bet calls a bookmaker, who records the bet plus 10 percent bookmaking fee. If the gambler wins, he collects his original bet. If he loses, he pays his original bet plus 10 percent.

When the amount bet on both teams are even, the bookie pays the winners with money collected from the losers and retains the 10 percent fee as profit.

"The bookie bets \$10 to win \$11. The bettor bets \$11 to win \$10," Oscar said.

BOOKIES COULD accept unevenly-

balanced bets, but would face the possibility of losing money if the team with the most money bet on it wins.

"I'd just as soon see (the bets) cancel out. Some bookies could lose \$200. I'd rather be guaranteed \$20," Oscar said.

Allen said he is technically called a runner because he calls in the difference in his bet totals to another man. That man is called a bookmaker because of the large amounts he handles and because his bet totals don't always balance. A bookmaker takes more risk than a runner, he said.

Both Oscar and Allen said they try to even the bet totals by convincing customers to bet on a particular team.

"People call and say, 'Who do you like' and expect you to see into the future," Allen said. "I say the team I don't have the money on. And I'm 50 percent right."

Oscar had nearly a hundred dollars more booked on San Diego than Oakland when a customer called a half-hour before kickoff.

His words into the phone receiver were a series of staccato responses to the bettor's questions.

"Don't let him psyche you out . . . It's at Oakland . . . He's due for a bad game . . . Casper's hellacious too." The receiver clicked.

"HE JUST BET \$55 on Oakland," Oscar said.

Oscar said bookies have considerable influence on gamblers, even though they know little about the games.

He called some gamblers "mindless" because they are easily influenced and often

bet on teams they know nothing about.

He said if a gambler from the East Coast called, he could have convinced him that Colorado would have steamrolled over Nebraska last Saturday.

The description of gambling is a disease of compulsion is an accurate one, he said.

"That (description) reminds me of myself," he said.

Oscar said he bets on something almost every day, but football gambling hasn't been kind to him. Oscar said he lost more than \$600 a month ago, and is more than \$500 down for the year.

Although he has been able to cover his losses, he said he hopes to win back everything.

Gambling is one way, but bookmaking is a surer bet, he said.

"I wish I was bigger, and handled \$10,000 to \$20,000 a week," he said. "That's \$1,000 on bookie (fees)."

"Could you imagine making \$1,000 a week just for answering the phone?"

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