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Riverdale enters new 'Galaxy'

By Joel Hall

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Before the new Galaxy Cinemas at 274 Highway 138 in Riverdale opened, there was some changing of hands. The facility had once been owned by Regal Cinemas, and most recently, by Spotlight Theaters as the Riverdale 14, which was vacated in November 2006.

In May of this year, however, Aalon Townsend, the district manager for Galaxy Theaters, a small, Georgia-based theater chain with two theaters in Norcross, saw an opportunity to create a different kind of theater in the city of Riverdale.

Townsend, 28, has been in the theater business since he was 14, working for Regal Cinemas, the Georgia Theater Company, and most recently as the general manager of the Carmike 12 Theater in Cartersville.

In April, the former Jonesboro resident signed on as the district manager for Galaxy Theaters, overseeing the two theaters in Norcross. In May, the company acquired the Riverdale 14 facility and began major renovations.

On June 29, Galaxy Theaters did a "soft-opening" and had its grand opening last Saturday. "This is our flagship theater," said Townsend. "It's one of our largest projects. We expect a lot out of this theater.

"I used to stay in Jonesboro," he continued. "I like the area. This renovation has been a long time coming. I think a lot of people were saying that it needed to happen."

In the renovated theater, along with the familiar smells of popcorn and nachos, you can also smell pizza and gourmet coffee. Rather than posting movie times, all of the movie information is provided on flat panel television screens.

There also is a large, family, fun room filled with various ticket redemption, racing, shooting, and dancing games. The arcade is equipped with an automatic ticket-redemption machine, in which people can redeem prizes by pushing a button rather than waiting for an attendant.

Alongside mainstream films, such as "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix" and "Hairspray," you can also see recent Indian blockbusters, such as "Jhoom Barabar Jhoom" and others dubbed and subtitled in Spanish.




All of this is monitored by more than 30 security cameras, with security provided seven days a week by the Riverdale Police Department.

During the grand opening on July 14, the theater hosted a free concert put on the Ludacris Foundation, right in the middle of the theater lobby. Several Riverdale rap, gospel, and dance groups performed, as well as 4-Ize from the Disturbing the Peace record label.

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was also on-site, HIV testing. In addition to 400 movie tickets sold on opening day, about 300 people attended the concert.

"Working for a smaller chain gives me a lot more flexibility," said Townsend. "The big chains don't do concerts like this."

He said the theater was planning several events with the City of Riverdale and the Riverdale Police Department, such as a gang-prevention rally and concert next month, during the opening of "Rush Hour 3." Next year, when the theater screens are upgraded to all-digital projection, he is planning to host large-screen, video-game tournaments.

Townsend said the theater did very well on its opening weekend, despite a lack of advertising. "That's why we knew that this theater was going to be special, because we didn't tell anybody we were opening," he said. "It will be something different and exciting for Riverdale."



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