



Premium Seating at BlueLight Cinemas
Photo: BlueLight Cinemas

Cupertino's BlueLight Cinema is discount moviegoing at its finest

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By **Dennis Willis**, SF Film Industry Examiner

Despite a handful of studios sprinting across the \$1 billion mark in record time, the summer season has been littered with expensive under-performers. Worse, the much-heralded 3D wave may actually be hurting the box office because now everybody knows that 3D screens tack on an additional \$4 per ticket for the glasses. From the endless commercials that run prior to showtime to the outrageous concession prices, it's no wonder why the entire industry is in a funk.

That's why the efforts of Art Cohen's [BlueLight Cinemas](#) in Cupertino are such a breath of cinematic fresh air. Since opening last November, the Bay Area's lone discount theater has offered a diverse selection of movies, festivals and live events. Even better, the admission price for popular second-run titles is five bucks or less per ticket, and that's not counting the numerous food deals for families, couples and seniors. In these financially-buffered times, that's better than a free refill of popcorn!

BlueLight Cinemas originally opened in the 1970s under the name The Oaks. The three-screen cineplex was expanded to five screens in the '90s, only to ultimately fall prey to the dot-com bust in 2002. The once-thriving theater lay dormant for seven years until Cohen, a successful businessman and avid movie lover, started thinking about the future.

"My consumer electronics products always focused on video and sound, so it was a natural for me to start something new that was of the same genre." Cohen, along with his wife Jackie and another family, realized the need for a discount theater in the Bay Area. "All of them had since been closed for various reasons and the time was ripe to re-open a venue that was family friendly in price and services."

But it wasn't exactly a turnkey business venture. In addition to all the requisite licensees needed, there was the matter of completely renovating the space and making it ready for prime time, in very short order. "We obtained access to the property in September '09 and we opened with all licenses in place by November 20th. In that short time, we had to bring to life a building that had been neglected for seven years ... new seats, cinema equipment, screens, flooring, lighting, concession equipment, etc."

Cohen knew he was taking a big risk, but as Rocky Balboa might have said, “No guts, no glory.” And thus far, the residents of Cupertino (and surrounding areas) have rewarded Cohen’s risks with frequent visits. “Many visit the theater and have great nostalgia remembering when they saw movies with their families here. They now bring their children or grandchildren here. I’m most touched by those that bring their young kids - usually about 3 years old – to their first visit to a movie theater!” BlueLight also offers free booster seats.

But it’s not like BlueLight Cinemas is simply content to dole out the same movies that just wrapped up their major runs. The BlueLight offers five to ten selections, seven days a week, all day starting at 2:00pm, all for five dollars each (Tuesdays are even cheaper, at two bucks).

While that is impressive enough, the key to longevity is diversity, and this is where Cohen’s out-of-the-box approach has worked well. “We now have live comedy at the theater at least once a month.” On August 28th, the theater hosted ComedySportz, a family-friendly event in which two comedians competed for the audience applause.

In June, Cohen welcomed the 3-Day Film Challenge, which found teams of local filmmakers producing competitive short films. The event was so successful, BlueLight will host a follow-up in October.

September brings a lineup of independent horror movies with a number of premieres, from September 17th through the 23rd. Also in September, director Vicki Abeles will bring her sobering documentary Race to Nowhere to the BlueLight.

Cohen is excited about the diverse program, citing programs for fans of Bollywood and Persian cinema as well. “Our re-birth of the theater is still young, however, we do have plans to bring 3D discount movies to BlueLight. Additionally, we plan to bring more art house and foreign films as they become available and host more film festival events.”

And honestly, how many theaters allow you to request movies on their websites?

To emerging filmmakers out there, Cohen has good news. “We want independent filmmakers to know that our venue is available for them, at reasonable costs, to get their movie up on the big screen.”

With Blockbuster Video on the skids, movies going directly to Video On Demand and 3D fatigue, the entire entertainment industry may be shaking itself out, but Cohen refuses to look at the experience of watching a movie on the big screen and think the sky is falling.

“I think there will always be a want and need for movie theaters into the foreseeable future. Movies are still the most inexpensive family entertainment and BlueLight would like to keep it that way. Even having a 60” home HD television isn’t the same as being with friends and family and enjoying that movie theater popcorn in front a 20-foot screen!”

Thanks to the efforts of Mr. Cohen and his partners, movie lovers looking for a good deal and a great environment have more choices than ever.

BlueLight Cinemas is located at Cupertino Oaks, 21275 Stevens Creek Blvd., Cupertino, CA 95014. Find them online at www.blulightcinemas.com