

The "grand lady" of downtown is the La Paloma Theatre. Its beautifully styled Spanish Revival is a jewel in the architectural scene now and in earlier times. This is the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this structure. It has gone through good and bad times. Now, it is in the good hands with patient and caring Allen Largent at the helm.

One of the good times was when Aubrey Austin displayed his artistic touch when he built the theatre in 1927-1928. Austin was President of the Santa Monica Savings Bank. Edward Baum and Carroll Cook were the architects. Inside décor is still the Art Deco, the interior style of the 20s. The cost of the building was \$50,000.

The opening on February 11, 1928 saw many Hollywood celebrities during the festivities. The opening guests saw the comedy "The Cohen's and the Kelly's in Paris."

Stars that frequented the theatre's first run films were Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Bessie Love, Charlie Chaplin, Peter Lorie, Bing Crosby, Pat O'Brien and many others. Encinitas was a convenient stop between Tijuana and Los Angeles during prohibition. So we had both local and Los Angeles visitors. We had the first talking pictures in a rural town. The Kilgen Wonder Organ supported the silent film music that came with each show. The orchestra pit was used by the Encinitas Orchestra during the opening. Live shows, such as vaudeville or hometown productions used the green room below the stage. A big hit with the young people were the lounges along the back wall. We had a balcony area with seating for a long time, but no seats are there now. Although the price of 5 cents for a child's ticket or a penny for candy seems very cheap, money was a real concern in those depression days.

Added income came from businesses located around the building like the ice-cream fountain. Every town had a Bank of America and we were no exception. On the north side of the building were six small apartments.

A series of owners have managed the building. The theatre flourished during the 1930s and 1940s. The La Paloma closed in 1963 when television and newer theatres were opened and movie clientele dropped. The theatre re-opened in 1972 with a musical performance by Woodie Guthrie. Two owners were especially interested in keeping the theatre active. One of them was Ed Seykota, who improved the seating, remodeled the bathrooms, concession area, and projection room. He strongly felt the theatre should be preserved. The other concerned owner is Allen Largent who has provided improvements and continued restoring the theatre. Restorations have included all major building systems including plumbing, electrical, doors, roof, and seating, and projects are ongoing. In addition all of the projection, sound, stage rigging, stage lighting, and concessions equipment have been modernized. Future improvements slated include air conditioning, and aesthetic improvements including carpet and drapes, plaster and paint. La Paloma continues to grow and prosper and the future looks bright.

Not many people would continue to operate this historic theatre as Allen has. His pragmatic and resourceful ways have kept this building open. Downtown would not be the same without this "grand lady." Thanks Allen for caring.