

GUEST

## America's love affair with the drive-in theater

BY TOM PURCELL



Long live one of America's finest creations: the drive-in theater.

One of my great drive-in memories dates to 1969, when my parents took my five sisters and me to see "Herbie the Love Bug" in our Plymouth Fury III station wagon.

As the blue sky fell dark and the film projector began rattling behind the concession stand, black-and-white numbers - "5, 4, 3, 2, 1..." - flashed onto the screen.

Scratchy, yellowed 1950s footage advertised concession-stand hot dogs, popcorn and candy.

And then the first film - a B movie - would play on the massive screen.

Kerry Segrave, author of "Drive-in Theaters: A History From Their Inception in 1933," explains why my deeply nostalgic drive-in memory could only happen in America.

First, in postwar America, there was an abundance of cheap land near America's rapidly growing suburbs - land that was easily accessible thanks to the new postwar highway system.

Second, the booming economy gave moms and dads disposable entertainment income - drive-ins were affordable and so were the home-packed coolers filled with Regent soda pop and French onion dip.

Third, the baby boom created large families seeking hassle-free activities. Parents could pile the kids into the car without having to "dress up" - the youngest ones often wore their pajamas because they'd be sound asleep by the drive home and could be put right to bed.

Fourth, America's postwar optimism created a love affair with the automobile - a symbol of our freedom to explore. Cars of that era - with their flashy chrome and massive size - became rolling works of American art.

"A country whose inhabitants regarded automobiles as simply a mode of convenience to get from A to B would never develop a drive-in industry of any extent," writes Segrave - which is why Canada and Australia were the only other two countries to embrace drive-in theaters, but they never came close to America's "intense love affair with drive-ins."

The 1950s and 1960s became the golden era of the drive-in theater with nearly 4,500 in operation across America - until a rapid decline that started in the early 1970s.

Federal laws mandating extended daylight saving time - which made the shows start an hour later - were the first major blow.

As the suburbs continued expanding, real estate costs soared and drive-in owners often sold land for huge profits.

Increasing lawsuits eliminated the drive-in playgrounds, and insurance costs soared, which further crushed profitability.

The family unit began to change in the late 1970s into the 1980s - families had fewer children and lots more divorce. And more families preferred to stay home to watch VCR movies and dozens of new cable channels.

Increasing fuel costs caused cars to get smaller - making them less comfortable.

The drive-ins went through a dark phase in the 1970s and 1980s, relying on adult films just to survive - but few survived.

Then came COVID-19. With indoor theaters closed and families desperate for entertainment, drive-ins experienced a surprise revival.

And now, driven largely by nostalgia, some 300 drive-in theaters are flourishing again.

If you're lucky enough to have a drive-in theater in your town, take your family to one of America's finest creations this summer.

You'll give your children a taste of Americana they will cherish forever.

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Find Tom Purcell's syndicated column, humor books and funny videos of his dog, Thurber, at TomPurcell.com. Email him at Tom@TomPurcell.com.



UPSIDE DOWN UNDER

## It's not summer, it's construction season

BY MARVIN BAKER

We've all heard the phrase North Dakota has two seasons, winter and construction season. We all complain about it because let's face it, construction can sometimes instantly screw up your day.

And it seems to be happening everywhere; city streets, county roads, state highways, federal highways, bridges, approaches, shoulders, you name it; some of us are getting as haunted by those orange cones as we would from an Alfred Hitchcock movie.

Yes, we all complain about it, but have any of us actually thought about why road construction happens so often on North Dakota roads?

I'll admit, I certainly didn't think about it until I started traveling in October of last year. It's been extensive travel that has taken me to eastern Indiana twice, to Rapid City twice and to Fort Myers, Fla. And yes, we drove to all these places so the opportunity was there to see and feel, if you will, the bumps in the road.

From here to Indiana we went through North and South Dakota, Iowa, Illinois and nearly all of Indiana, stopping 14 miles short of the Ohio state line.

From here to Florida we went through North Dakota and Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Tennessee, Mississippi,

Alabama and if you aren't familiar with Fort Myers, it's about 100 miles to the southwest of Tampa.

That's a lot of miles and a lot of different highways. In fact, we got lost taking a wrong exit on a roundabout just west of Dubuque, Iowa and ended up in a residential area, so we got to see at least a couple of Dubuque city streets.

The point here is, some of those roads are fantastic and others are horrible. Arguably, the worst roads we encountered were in and around Tupelo, Miss.; across the entire state of Indiana with the exception of the Indianapolis metro; North Dakota and South Dakota.

As an example, you could be blindfolded in Mississippi or Illinois and know exactly when you get to Alabama or Indiana because you are hitting rough roads.

Now granted, I might be comparing apples and oranges here because we only drove through those other states, but here in North Dakota, I've been on many more highways and county roads.

In North Dakota's defense, some of the roads have improved greatly. There are some that feel like a magic carpet ride while others are

so rough you want to either drive the edge of the road or turn around and take a different route.

Last year I drove to several car shows including Medora and Watford City. Honestly, I thought my car was going to fall apart because it shook so much in spots. This year it's being transported in a trailer so I won't have to worry about that.

Our daughter has been living in Rapid City for nearly 10 years so we've made a lot of trips there. We used to go south of Dickinson on N.D. Highway 22, but that road got so bad, we had to find an alternate route. So we started traveling south of Beulah to Elgin and Lemmon, S.D., just to be on better highways. Now, N.D. 22 has been improved.

It would be a pleasure driving across southern Illinois and western Florida if the traffic wasn't so great. The roads are very well built and very well maintained. And we

avoided toll roads. Those are north and closer to Chicago. Cross the border into Indiana and it's instant potholes. Go west into Iowa and the roads are good, but not as smooth as in Illinois.

So what do you reckon it is, not enough taxation, not enough warm bodies to do the work, poor planning or something else? North Dakota's busiest roads don't have the number of vehicles that average Illinois roads or even Iowa roads have. Then why is there so much construction? And why are some roads like riding on a washboard?

If I contacted the DOT about this, they would most likely tell me it's because of the frost and thaw cycles, but that doesn't happen in Mississippi. Why are those roads so bad?

Marvin Baker is a news writer for the Kenmare News and formerly Foster County Independent.



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## - Weekly Crossword -

### CLUES ACROSS

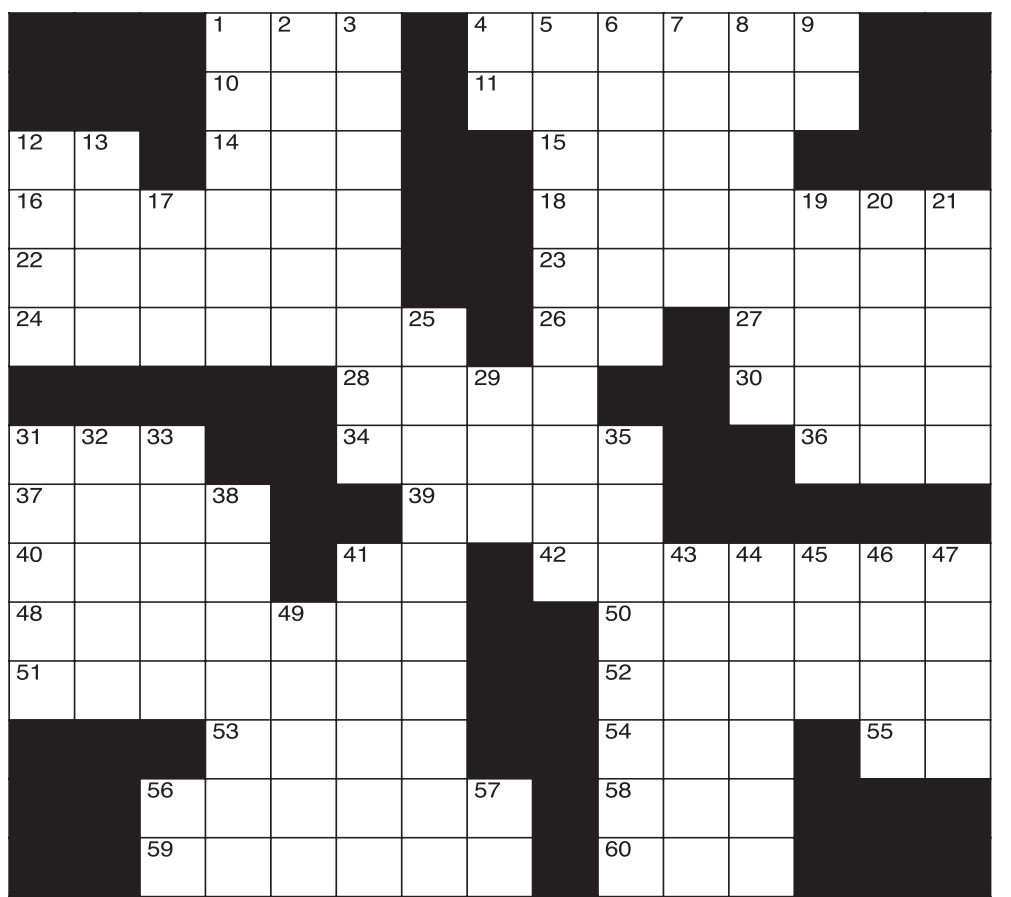
- 1. Similar
- 4. Have an ambitious plan or a lofty goal
- 10. No (Scottish)
- 11. \_\_\_ Aires, city
- 12. Morning
- 14. Senior's son (abbr.)
- 15. A notable achievement
- 16. European nation
- 18. Endings
- 22. Puts into place
- 23. Former
- 24. Grenadier
- 26. Sea patrol
- 27. Algerian port
- 28. Norwegian river
- 30. Precipitation
- 31. Sunscreen rating
- 34. New York is one
- 36. Patti Hearst's captors
- 37. Soft mineral with greasy feel
- 39. Retired Brazilian footballer
- 40. An Indian nursemaid
- 41. Atomic #24
- 42. Immobile

- 48. Insignia of royalty
- 50. Seeds from which chocolate is made
- 51. Begin again
- 52. Round root
- 53. Beginning to end (alt. sp.)
- 54. What newlyweds just said
- 55. Empire State
- 56. Give back
- 58. College hoops tournament
- 59. Unstable situations
- 60. Young women's association

### CLUES DOWN

- 1. Administer a drug
- 2. Holy places
- 3. Contrary opinions
- 4. Blood type
- 5. Gags
- 6. Micturating
- 7. Silly
- 8. A type of cuff
- 9. Spanish be
- 12. Austrian river

- 13. Messenger ribonucleic acid
- 17. Consume food
- 19. California supermarket
- 20. Electronic communication
- 21. Cassia tree
- 25. Written works
- 29. Cool!
- 31. Noteworthy '90s lawyer Kenneth
- 32. One who was compensated
- 33. National symbols
- 35. Raising
- 38. A type of talk
- 41. Cloud
- 43. Middle Eastern peoples
- 44. Pouches
- 45. 007's creator
- 46. A cut of meat
- 47. Sports entertainment award
- 49. Christine \_\_, actress
- 56. Relief organization (abbr.)
- 57. Canadian province (abbr.)



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