



# The Leesburg Review

Musings on all that really matters -- and then some

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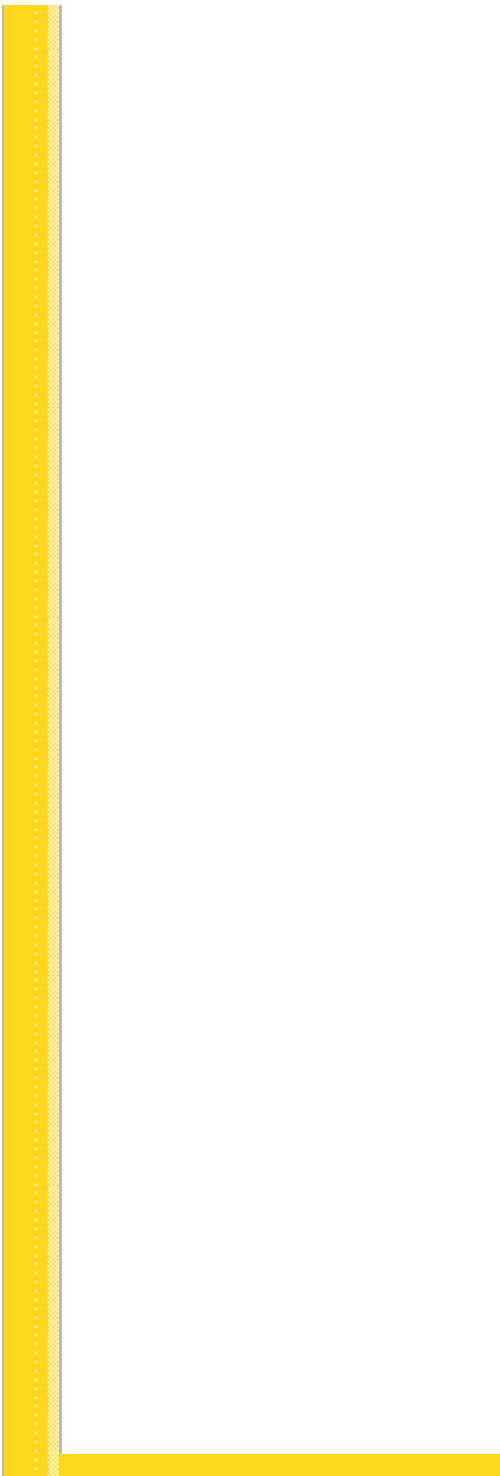
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## Juno, the Ho and me

Jan. 25, 11:55 PM

by Bill Horne

When the death of the Tally Ho Theatre was announced in *Leesburg Today* in December, I was ticked off. Was this to be the nail in the coffin of the years-long efforts by townsfolk and business owners to inject life --more and better restaurants, a higher quality and variety of retail stores -- into our Main Street? More to the point, how could I live an idyllic small-town existence if the very heart of that town, a creaky, two-plex movie house built in 1931, closed its doors?



The Tally Ho, Jan. 23, 3:10 p.m

In short, this wasn't just about the sad demise of a struggling local institution. It was about me. And what I really wanted to say was "Waaaa!"

After a decade of mulling it over, my family and I had finally moved just a year earlier from a house in the boonies—some five miles outside of Leesburg--right into the heart of downtown. With McMansions and developments increasingly cluttering a once-pristine view, with light pollution opening a new front on the far hillside and my morning commute 10 minutes longer thanks to the new stoplights on route 15, it was time to pack it in. Besides, we were eager to return to the urban experience of walking out for food and drink and entertainment, even on so small a scale as Leesburg now offers.

The burg's still-quiet downtown offered succor and a sinecure: Developers could not clearcut a swath next door and throw up plastic-sided boxes, could they? And there would always be food, drink and films, right?

**T**he [Tally Ho](#), if we are to be honest, has not provided cinephiles with a superb movie-viewing experience in years. The seats literally creak when you lean back, there are no cup holders, and the sound is not always hi-fidelity. More importantly, the selection of movies playing in recent years—particularly for sentient adult moviegoers--has often been bland at best, and occasionally verged on atrocious.

Still, the popcorn was and is fresh and buttery, the audience is generally attentive, and it is a quintessential small-town experience to stroll down the street, grab a cup of coffee at the excellent [Market Street Coffee](#), and get lost in a movie, day or night, seven days a week. Yes, I too now have a biggish screen at home, but there is absolutely no substitute for the fellowship of an audience in a darkened theater or for the seductive thrill of watching a fresh new film. And theaters, whatever the quality of the featured film, have a way of working stealthily but unrelentingly on our memories and emotions, evoking precious times and places from our pasts, or transporting us however fleetingly to other places, other lives.

So it was selfishly, and with a sense of being somehow duped (after all, I had moved for this--how could they??) that I raised the alarm in December. Before the marquee lights flickered out, before our beloved Ho, warts and all, was to close and perhaps reopen as yet another downtown bank or law office or some other blank, soul-deadening reminder of Leesburg's past (consider "The Offices at Laurel Brigade" now occupying that quaint inn), I, we, would make a last stand!

I fired off an email to friends and neighbors, informing them of the Ho's fate and calling on them to join the cause. Stop monkeying around and come Save the Ho! The responses were heartening, offers of help interspersed with Huzzahs and fond memories ("So sad--I can remember my first kiss, first date, a lot of firsts in the theater," wrote one.) Posters and buttons were in the offing (Long Live the Ho!); an investment group began to take shape.

One friend and I even conjured up a way to bring the Tally Ho into the 21<sup>st</sup> century using his Web 2.0 strategy: we would secure funding from a local tech titan—think Steve Case or Ted Leonsis--then let viewers vote via the Web on what they would be willing to go see, and that's what the Ho would show. So brilliant! So today! So Google!

But perhaps impractical in the short term. (“Let’s see, that’s four for La Vie en Rose and three for Batman 6 — Rose has it!”)

Others, it seems, were similarly moved, thank goodness. By the end of the year, the theater’s landlord had announced that a new partnership would take the lease and keep the projectors running, and add some live entertainment as well. The Ho was closed only a week, reopening on January 11<sup>th</sup>.

We waited with bated breath; what movie might signal the rebirth of our town’s only movie house?

That movie, of course, was Juno.

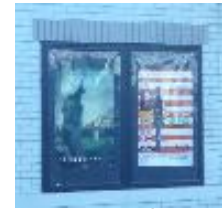
Could the new partners have picked a better debut flick? It is, after all, a hopeful film, one that celebrates the purity and complexity of love while exploring the realities of a very thorny but modern issue, featuring a brilliantly wry script and a voluble, pitch-perfect new actress, Ellen Page, who manages to teach us a little more about love and marriage, while making us laugh, and even cry (well, you know, the women!) all along the way. (To say nothing of the terrific supporting cast--seriously, in this film, Michael Cera puts the dead back in deadpan.)

In my book—and it was unanimous among the four of us who went together last week--Juno was a solid A, with its clutch of Oscar nominations a serendipitous affirmation of the new owners’ choice.

An offbeat PG-13, it is very unlikely Juno would have appeared at the old Tally Ho, which tended to stick with flashy but critically panned big movies like Spiderman, and PG-rated cartoons and soft fare that even my children (tweeners and teens) would not be caught dead at.

David Wright, the public face of Market Street Productions, the new theater operator, told me that Juno -- along with Cloverfield, a well-reviewed monster-attacks-Manhattan flick—were picked to “put our stamp on the Tally Ho”. He hopes to bring in at least three other Oscar Best Picture nominees, No Country for Old Men, There Will Be Blood, and Michael Clayton -- all dark, artful, acclaimed films, even if they break into R territory. To which I again say: Bravo!

When I asked about foreign-language films, though, Wright demurred, noting it was a niche market that they may dip into "once in a blue moon." I understand the need to make this a financially feasible venture, and the case I made to Wright is that there is no competition out here for the excellent foreign films that many of us drive into DC or Arlington for at the moment. He could have a lock on that market.



Now Playing

I do hope they will reconsider and at least try out a few "mainstream" foreign-language films, that is, those whose excellence and accessibility has led to their wide release in the states, such as 2006's *Volver* and Pan's *Labyrinth*, or such recent fare as *La Vie en Rose*, *the Orphanage*, and *the Diving Bell and the Butterfly*. Maybe some overseas-based arts-minded local benefactor, like say [Rehau](#), could be coaxed into underwriting a couple nights of foreign films per month? Regardless, if you show them, Dave, we will come.

And if we do come, it will hopefully be in sufficient numbers to warrant some more serious renovation; for now the new lessees promise some fresh paint and oiled hinges, a modest but worthy start.

Wright, the head of the Last Ham Standing comedy troupe, is also intent on bringing more live shows to the Ho; last week his group and a magic show drew some 140 people over two nights. (The next show will be the First Friday in February.) He plans to try to partner with a local eatery to do dinner/theater combos. While Wright floated a couple of possibilities, the no-brainer to me is some sort of prix-fix dinner movie deal with [Lightfoot](#), the only place big enough and good enough and sufficiently staffed to pull it off. Call the Gustavsons, Dave, and tell them Bill sent you.

As for me, the movies trump everything else – showing good films and getting the word out that they are there are what will ensure the Ho's viability. Sure the chairs creaked a little when I was last there (for Juno), and the speakers crackled now and again. But the popcorn made a satisfying crunch, the audience clearly appreciated the show, and the film itself was terrific. I can't wait to see *Cloverfield*.

Spread the word: The Ho is back, and as Juno would say, it's like, totally boss.

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Got something to say? then [Talk Back!](#)

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The Leesburg Review is an independent online journal of opinion on the doings in Leesburg, Virginia and its environs, wholely owned and produced by its editor, W. W. Horne Jr.

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