

**Area Revitalization Key**

# *Group Fights to Save Takoma Park Theater*

By Jackson Diehl

Washington Post Staff Writer

At dusk Saturday, a band of light appeared on the front of the old brick building at Fourth and Butternut streets NW, beneath the clatter of Metro trains.

Soon after, small groups of people began to drift through the building's glass doors, and cars swung in and out of an adjacent parking lot. Otherwise, however, Fourth Street's commercial strip, one block from the Takoma Park Metro Station was dark, quiet and empty.

The light belonged to the marquee of the old Takoma Theatre, which was offering one of its weekend double-bills: two W. C. Fields films for \$2.50. Next Saturday night, however, the theater's owners may leave the marquee dark — thus crippling the plans of a nonprofit neighborhood group which wants to make the movie house the starting point of a community revitalization.

K-B Theatres, which holds the lease on the Takoma Theatre till April, has been leasing it out on weekends to the neighborhood group. But last week K-B announced it is shutting down the house entirely, as of today.

Last-minute negotiations are under way, but already, K-B workers have removed the pay telephone and some concession equipment from the theater's spacious lobby. "They have the attitude that a movie theatre just won't make it in this area," said Sara Green, a leader of the community group, Neighborhood Film Association. "They are a business, and they

look at it from a purely profit-oriented position."

"But from our point of view, the theater is a community landmark, Green said. "It's the largest, juiciest piece of real estate on the street. And if we can't keep it going, it could be torn down and turned into a high-rise. And that's frankly just the opposite of what this community wants."

The Neighborhood Film Association, a group of about 20 residents of the Takoma Park area, approached K-B last February with the offer to operate the theater on weekends. "We knew absolutely nothing about running a movie house," Green said. "But . . . we thought we could open a repertory house that would be a community gathering place." The K-B management had been showing Spanish-language films.

The "repertory" of the film association over the succeeding months has varied from evening double bills of old classics and recent second-runs—"Singing in the Rain" and "The Good-bye Girl"—to regular Saturday-afternoon children's matinees.

Attendance has been below the break-even point—the largest crowds have been no bigger than 200—and Takoma residents and friends have had to donate hundreds of dollars to keep the operation going each week. Green and her husband, Rich Holz-sager, have given or loaned the film association \$1,200 this year.

The film association's financial problems are not likely to improve, Green said. To continue their operations, they will have to raise several

**See TAKOMA, B4, Col. 3**

# Group Struggles To Keep Theater Going in Takoma

TAKOMA, From B1

thousand dollars in a matter of weeks to take over the theater's lease from K-B, which is anxious to move out of Takoma.

According to Tevy Schlafman, who has been working with his mother-in-law, Francis H. Wolowitz, the theater's owner, K-B has agreed to keep the house open another month while negotiating its lease—which expires in April—with Schlafman and the film association.

But Dave Burka, who has been managing K-B's involvement in the Takoma, said Saturday, "I haven't committed myself to anything. As far as I'm concerned it's closing the 31st."

"I said I would discuss it with (Schlafman) on Tuesday," Burka said. "Whether we turn over the theater to the community group depends on what they are willing to do. I don't really care — I don't want to discuss it any further."

The NFA and its two parent groups, Neighborhoods Inc. and Plan Takoma, are now making the rounds of local businesses and foundations in the hopes of raising \$10,000-\$12,000 to operate the theater for a year.

If they are successful, Green said, they plan to expand their screenings of movie classics to week nights, open a community art gallery in the lobby, and expand their children's programs, perhaps in cooperation with the D.C. schools.

And beyond that, the groups hope



Sara Green, left, president of Neighborhood Film Association, poses with helpers in Takoma Theatre lobby.

By Larry Morris—The Washington Post

that they can use the theater to set the tone of a revitalization along Fourth Street and the other areas around the Metro station.

"This theater could be the key to how this neighborhood looks in another decade," said Brent Blackwelder, the chairman of Plan Takoma.

"It's only two stories, and it could set the scale for what happens on zoning around the Metro stop."

"We've got to have some kind of revitalization," said Nate Sims, the president of Neighborhood stops. "But we want to take a moderate course that is compatible with this community. We

don't want another Crystal City."

Schlafman said that his family has received a number of offers from developers who want to tear down the Takoma and replace it with warehouses or office buildings. But the Neighborhood Film Association, he says, will have first shot at the lease.