

Now just picture this

Homestead plans revival of old movie house

By GEOFFREY TOMB
Herald Staff Writer

The last picture show ran in 1979 at Homestead's old Seminole Theater. After that it was just another vacant single-screen movie theater in a dying downtown. Then came Hurricane Andrew and the building's roof was torn away. Bring down the curtain, they said.

But like the city itself, the Seminole still stands. Oh, you can see blue sky where the rafters should be, while weeds and pigeons live upstairs in the old balcony. But the walls and steel beams are sound.

Now, the 77-year-old movie theater is seen as the key ingredient in the revival of one of Miami-Dade's most historic communities. A sneak preview of possible coming attractions at the Seminole is set for today at Homestead City Hall.

The plan calls for the \$3.5 million restoration of the vintage Art Deco-style building and converting it into a performing arts center for live theater, dance and musicals, as

well as a 450-seat center for public meetings, a regional cultural center and even a site for classic movies on a Sunday afternoon.

"This becomes the heart of our downtown," said Betty Calabrese, president of the nonprofit Seminole Theater Group. "And if we have a heart, we will get that downtown."

Group organizers will meet at 1 p.m. with Mayor Steve Shriver and other city officials to outline a series of steps to bring the idea to a reality. If it happens, the Seminole will be a magnet, drawing an estimated 60,000 people a year to its doors, located at 18 N. Krome Ave. in the heart of the old commercial district.

"It becomes an excellent redevelopment tool," said project architect J. Robert Barnes, a Homestead native who remembers watching movies there when he was a boy. His plans call for reusing the concession stand as a cafe and converting the two-story building next door into theater offices and retail space.

PLEASE SEE THEATER, 2B



MARICE COHN BAND / Herald Staff

THE OLD BALCONY: Dori Goldman, executive director of the Seminole Theater Group, and architect Robert Barnes inside the old Homestead movie house.

Homestead to have a theater revival

THEATER, FROM 1B

The terrace above the marquee could also be used.

Unlike so many restoration projects, organizers are not overly nervous about raising the necessary money. State, county and city grants of more than \$300,000 are already in hand and there is an air of confidence that others will follow.

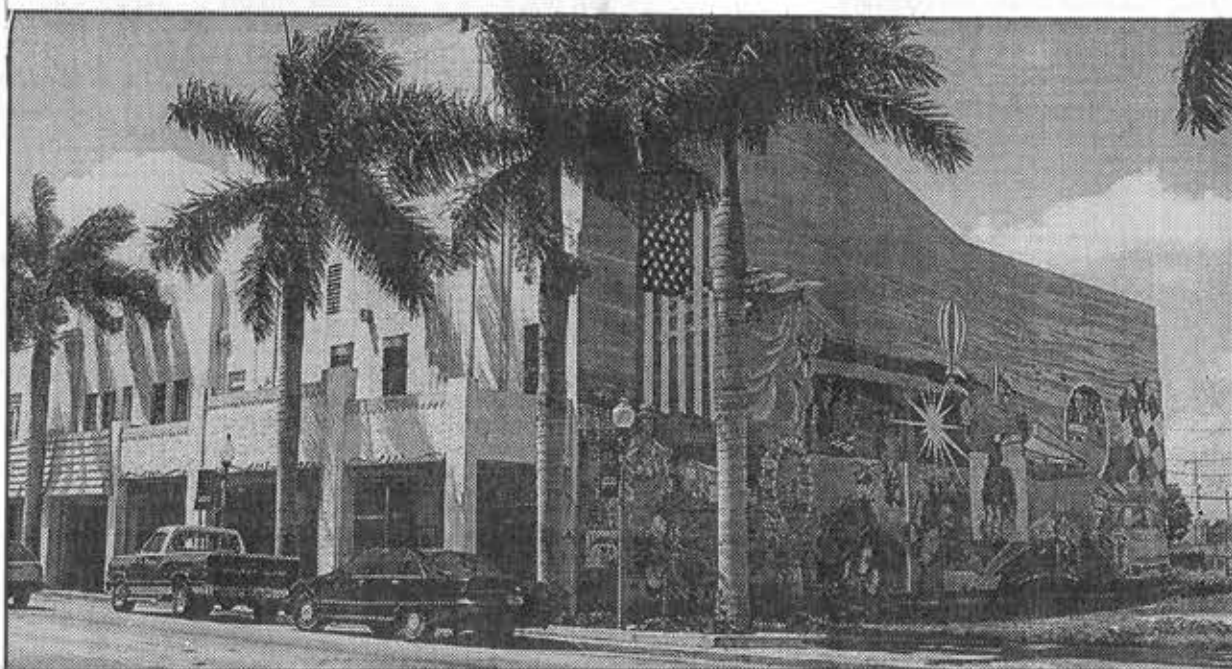
Dori Goldman, executive director of the group, is pushing ahead with projections for operating funds and marketing plans.

"It's not 'build it and they will come,'" she said. "It is 'build it and then your work begins,'" said Goldman, a veteran of community theater groups in Key Biscayne and the Florida Shakespeare Theater in Coral Gables.

Since Andrew struck in 1992, much has happened in downtown Homestead. Antique shops, neat restaurants and an art center have sprung up. But there is little now to attract nighttime events. The revival of the Seminole is viewed at the missing link.

If that were to happen, it would be déjà vu all over again for the old picture show.

The Seminole opened on Nov. 26, 1921, showing Cecil B. DeMille's *Forbidden Fruit*. The movie house became so popular and crowded that a second theater was



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COMING BACK: The Seminole Theater, above, has been closed since 1979 and lost its roof to Hurricane Andrew. Plans are now under way to repair and reopen it. At left is a postcard view of the theater when it knew better times.



announced in 1926. A hurricane interrupted.

It remained the only indoor movie between South Miami and the Upper Keys, but was destroyed in a vivid fire on March 8, 1940. A crowd of 3,000 watched it burn.

Rebuilt, in its present-day Deco-style and with a state-of-the-art indoor sprinkler system, it reopened on Aug. 18, 1940, showing *New Moon* starring Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald. During World War II and into the

1950s, it was the entertainment center in Homestead.

In the early 1970s, the theater was renamed the Premiere and it showed Spanish-language films. It shut down in 1979 and has remained vacant.