

It's curtains for Towne

By Cam Fuller
of The StarPhoenix

Saskatoon's last movie palace has abruptly closed, leaving its owners scratching their heads and claiming Cineplex Odeon has broken its lease.

Towne Cinema on 20th Street, built in 1930 when it was called the Roxy, had its final screenings Thursday evening. One of the last films shown was *Die Hard: With a Vengeance*, but shutting the doors was no struggle for Cineplex, which considers the theatre to be run-down.

"It's an older facility which is not up to our standards of what we think movie-going should be all about," Howard Lichtman, a Cineplex execu-

tive vice-president, said from Toronto.

The Towne was built in the Spanish villa style, with interior walls designed to resemble an outdoor courtyard. Although some might consider it to have rustic charm, Lichtman said that's not an issue.

"It's about state-of-the-art equipment, it's about digital theatre sound, it's about modern, comfortable seats, it's about cupholders."

Cineplex leased the Towne from Landmark Cinemas of Calgary. Landmark's senior vice-president, Frank Kettner, said his company was not informed of the decision. He said it's a violation of the long-term lease to close down.

"I honestly don't have a clue (why

Cineplex pulled out)."

"I expect to hear from them (today)."

Cineplex is looking for a site to build a new multiplex theatre in Saskatoon, Lichtman said. There has been speculation a theatre will be built in the new River City Centre Mall on 42nd Street, but Lichtman wouldn't confirm that.

"We have not yet found a site."

Lichtman said his company is trying to find room for the Towne employees at Pacific Cinemas. Ken Bell, who managed the Towne for 22 years, has already moved over. He referred all inquiries to head office.

Cineplex's pullout comes just a week after Magic Lantern Theatres of Edmonton opened the first-run, seven-screen Centre Cinemas on Eighth

Street. The company plans to open an eight-screen, second-run house called Rainbow at the same location after Labor Day. Admission prices at Rainbow will be \$2.50 for regular evenings and \$1.50 for matinees and Tuesdays.

Company president Tom Hutchinson wasn't sure if Cineplex is responding to his move.

"We felt when we built there that the market was under-served. It could be they were content to let it be under-served until competition came along."

Cineplex says it wasn't motivated by the new theatre.

"It wasn't like a quick decision. We've been looking at that facility for a while. We basically decided to bite the bullet now," said Lichtman.