Ocean County: A Destination for Great Film

By Graelyn Brashear

The Traco Theater: Toms River's New Home for Indie Film



Exterior of new TRACO Theater on Washington Avenue, Toms River.
Photo credit: Downtown Toms River/Vicki Pecchioli

It's a good time to be a movie buff in Ocean County. The Traco (Toms River Art Company) Theater is an arts destination and independent theater in downtown Toms River that creates opportunities for film-watchers and film-makers alike. This budding independent film house and arts venue is a welcome complement to two annual, spring film festivals in Ocean County: Ocean County Library Film Festival and the Lighthouse International Film Festival on Long Beach Island.

The Traco Theater opened in 2011 as the side project of partners Helen Harris and Kim Ratto, who were operating a bakery and lunch counter called the Cookie Cab on Washington Street in Toms River. They wanted to expand and serve dinner, "but we felt we needed something for our diners to do," said Harris. They learned of the old Traco Theater, a Toms River landmark that had been located immediately adjacent to the new, namesake theater. They got permission to use the old theater's name for their new venture, and they were off, said Harris.

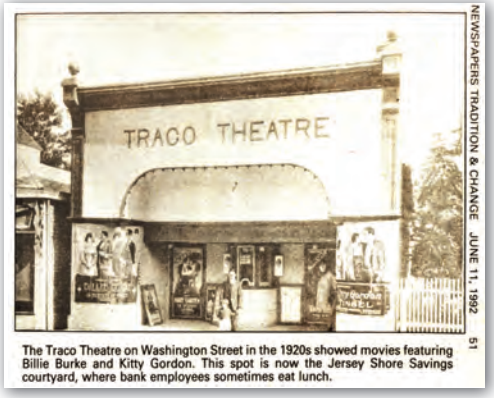
The historic Traco was built in the early 1900s and first hosted live burlesque theatre, silent movies and eventually featured "talkies." In the 1950's the building became a Pharmacy and was eventually torn down, a victim of competition from larger, multiplex movie houses.

"It's an independent cinema and playhouse, showing indie films, documentaries and classics," she said. "It's a mix, and we did that to try to grab a wide audience."

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Although built for movies, the Traco also has live entertainment events available. Plays, comedy acts, acoustic music, and readings are just some of what will be on the stage throughout the year. A visual art studio and classroom space will also be opening on site.



Historic TRACO Theatre.
Photo Credit: Ocean County Collection

When it comes to movies, said Harris, customers often call the shots. "Quite often, they'll give us the name of the film and we'll try to get it," said Harris. The theater has been a hit. "Customers talked about always having to drive to Red Bank or Asbury" to see independent films, but now they can dine and be entertained closer to home.

Listed below is the summer lineup of movies that the Traco will be screening:

The Hindenburg	June 28 - July 3
Smokey and the Bandit	July 20 – July 26
Summer of '42	July 27 - August 2
The Gumball Rally	August 3 - August 9
Bullitt	September 7 - September 13

For more information about any movie times or live events, visit their website at **www.tracotheater.com.**