

# Plaza Cinema and Media Arts Center goes digital

BY MARGARET-ANNE LOGAN

Faced with Hollywood's recent ultimatum that movie theaters across the country must either "go digital or go dark," the Plaza Cinema and Media Arts Center in Patchogue proudly held its first digital film screening at an event on Dec. 11. Patrons and community leaders gathered for a celebration and special viewing of "The Invisible Woman," a film not set to hit theaters until February 2014.

The Plaza's acquisition of the new technology represents a dual victory for the independent theater, which raised the money necessary for the conversion — a whopping \$55,000. As 35mm film will cease to be used for new movies by the end of 2013, it has become essential for theaters both great and small to make the transition to digital cinema technology. The new system not only offers improved image and sound quality, but is also intended to prevent the creation of pirated film copies.

"Art houses and multiplexes alike all have to convert," explained Catherine Oberg, co-founder of the Plaza Cinema and Media Arts Center. "We need the digital technology to stay viable and competitive."

Community support was essential to the cinema's fundraising campaign. Together, patrons donated a total of \$44,783, an amount supplemented by a Regional Economic Development Council grant of \$25,500. The size of the grant was determined by the REDC, based on the philanthropic health of the organization as demonstrated by private donations.

"Fifty-five thousand dollars is a lot of money for a small cinema to raise," remarked Isabella Rossellini, a trustee member of the theater. "We did it in six months. That shows the support we received from our community."

Jim Meyer, vice president of the Association of Fundraising Professionals on Long Island, believes that local interest in the Plaza stems from the unique opportunities offered there. "It's a great way to be involved in something happening in its beginning stages," he observed. "There



Plaza Cinema and Media Arts Center's board of trustees: Dr. Joseph Graskemper, Campbell Dalglish, Isabella Rossellini, Catherine Oberg and James McPeak.

Photo by Margaret-Anne Logan

aren't many places out there with this kind of programming. It's nice that nonprofit agencies can do this."

Programming at the Plaza includes family film screenings, animation classes for children and teens, and lunchtime screenings of operas, ballets and symphonies. The

theater has recently connected with a distributor that provides films for 46 other screens, allowing it to show rare films from around the world as a first-run cinema.

The Plaza Cinema and Media Arts Center is currently undergoing a renovation that will expand seating capacity from 65

to 100 seats, part of its effort to build a strong presence as a local cinema. It will re-open on Dec. 26 with a screening of "Nebraska," a film that received acclaim at this year's Cannes Film Festival. The film will be screened with the new digital technology. ■