



Belvedere

Improvement Association

February 6, 2007

Letter to the Editor

The Sun

Once a year we have an opportunity to see *It's a Wonderful Life* on the big screen at the Senator Theatre. In it, the head of a small town savings and loan sacrifices his ambitions to live out his values by providing home loans so that average folks can own. In so doing, he prevents Bedford Falls from becoming "Potterville," a bleak, uniform company town named for the banker to whom the buck is most important. What has prevented Baltimore from becoming the "Potterville" of cinema experience? Well, in good measure it has been the Senator Theatre.

Over the years, local media have relished in covering the grand and high-profile events the Senator makes possible—from the folks who camp out and stand in long lines for *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* to those who have attended gala fundraisers to film premieres with spotlights in the sky. Less visible, but as important, are the myriad of community-building events that its owner has enabled to take place.

For 12 years, I have been president of the Belvedere Improvement Association (BIA), which represents the residential neighborhood surrounding the Senator Theatre. For the past ten of those years, the Senator and BIA have co-sponsored two annual events at the Senator—open and free to the community—the Belvedere SpringFest in April and the FallFest in October. In addition to free films, we have had performers such as Maria Broom, Carl Grubbs and Friends, and Xaala Mainama African Arts Ensemble, drum circles, Govans history and poster contests, and, every year at Halloween, a costume parade across the stage during which the emcee, Tom Kiefaber, gives each child a moment in the spotlight. Many, many other groups have similar stories to tell of the important role that the Senator has played in their organizations.

What many folks don't seem to understand is that what makes the Senator Theatre so special—and such an asset to Baltimore—is not just the building, but the unique sense of cinema history, expertise, dedication, community-mindedness and flair that its owner, Tom Kiefaber, brings to it.

I suggest we all take a cue from *It's a Wonderful Life* in the current situation. If everyone who saw a film at the Senator in the past year sent just \$1 to the theater, Mr. Kiefaber's immediate financial need would be met. As for the long-term financial stability of the Senator with Tom Kiefaber at the helm, that's up to the governor, the mayor, and Mr. Potter at the bank to work out. Let's make sure they do it, so that this part of *our* wonderful lives remains intact.

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The Belvedere Community, located in North Central Baltimore, surrounding York and Belvedere, is noted for its wide variety of well-maintained, affordable homes with mature trees and landscaping. We have a strong sense of community and celebrate our diversity. For more information, call 410-323-8786.

