Meeting Notes – Apr. 16, 2024 –

The LaFayette Rotary Cub met on Tuesday, April 16, 2024, for its weekly meeting. Rotarian Allen Tucker was responsible for the program. He invited as his speaker, Sid Mickle, pictured at the left, a LaFayette native, retired businessman, and author. Sid spoke to us about the downtown LaFayette Martin Theater renovation project.

Sid recalled the theater being the gathering spot for his generation. Construction of the theater began in 1947 or 1948 and was completed on March 11, 1949. He believes it is one of less than 10 quonset hut theaters still in existence. There was one screen in the theater, and it had a seating capacity of 669. The first movie that played in the theater was That Wonderful Urge starring Tyrone Power and Gene Tierney. The original admission price was $0.25. At the time, the theater was segregated. There were separate entrances, exits, seating and restrooms. The theater closed in the early 1970s.

The theater was donated to Chambers Academy in February of 2017 and plans are now underway to renovate it. Some work on the roof has already been done and a few years ago Rotary awarded them a small grant to help with that cost. The original concession stand is still in its original place. The word Martin can still be found in the theater. Pieces of memorabilia have been preserved, such as popcorn bags, signage, slivers of film from the 1962 John Wayne movie The Longest Day, and its original doors. The top part of the original spire remains, although much of it was lost in a storm. The theater was used as a prop and backdrop in the 1988 film Mississippi Burning, that was filmed here in LaFayette.

A citizens' committee has been formed to oversee the renovation. More volunteers are needed. The committee wants to make the renovation a focal point of the revitalization taking place in our community. The goal is to have an event center open and inclusive to the entire community. The committee is raising money for three stages in the renovation project: 1) building safety so people can enter and exit safely; 2) restoring full mechanical operations; and 3) the grand opening. There is a Downtown LaFayette Martin Theater Facebook page for those wanting to follow the renovation progress.

Diane Sherriff