

# Block Club Chicago

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## After A Pandemic Slump, Portage Park's Patio Theater Ready To Create Its Next Chapter

The owner has renovated parts of the old theater since taking it over in 2019 and plans to replace the marquee, bring back its historic “cloud sky” and hook up its organ once he has enough revenue.



By Ariel Parrella-Aureli  
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The sun sets over the Patio Theater in Portage Park on March 1, 2022. Credit: Colin Boyle/Block Club Chicago

PORTAGE PARK — After hanging on for two-and-a-half years, the historic **Patio Theater** is bringing back more events, concerts and other shows as entertainment life reawakens.

Like many music venues, the nearly 30,000-square-foot theater at 6008 W. Irving Park Road closed its doors at the start of 2020 and only reopened at the beginning of the year with in-person performances and **COVID-19 guidelines**. But they've not yet returned to staging the number of shows in a consistent schedule as before the pandemic, owner Chris Bauman said.

Bauman **renovated** parts of the theater while it was closed, repainting and replacing parts of the marquee, fixing the canopy and parts of the roof that were caving in, adding fresh coats of paint on the walls and a new electrical system.

Another project that's kept Baumann busy is the Patio's stars of fame: Dozens of yellow and blue metal stars hang on the theater's lobby walls as tributes to artists who have sold out the theater. Performers such as Coolio, Shoreline Mafia, Rata Blanca and Kamelot have a yellow star.

“It was inspired by the Hollywood Walk of Fame and is a neat way to honor and show the [theater] history,” Bauman said.



Metal stars hang on the lobby walls of the Patio Theater, 6008 W. Irving Park Road, representing artists that have

Blue stars along the center wall are an ode to Chicago musicians and concert promoters, including some who have died, like **Juice WRLD**. A blue star for the Smashing Pumpkins also greets guests in the lobby.

Lead singer Billy Corgan, who is from Portage Park, saw his first show at the Patio as a child and the band has performed and practiced at the theater before, Bauman said.

Bauman, who **took over the 1,500-seat theater in late 2019**, has also been busy booking acts for the end of this year and already has performers lined up for fall 2023 in an effort to bring back live music and entertainment to the 95-year-old venue that is a **Far Northwest Side treasure**.

Just in time for the holiday season, the Patio's "HalloScream" **movie series** kicks off Thursday. It will feature classic Halloween movies throughout October such as "House on Haunted Hill," "A Nightmare on Elm Street," "Halloween 2" and more.

The series is an homage to the theater's history as a movie hub and a way to bring the community back in to experience the space after the pandemic, the owner said. A similar Christmas program will be unveiled soon and will feature family-friendly movies, performers and puppeteers and more holiday fun, Bauman said.

Bauman, who used to be a concert promoter, also owns the Avondale Music Hall and other music venues in the suburbs under his music management company **Zenith Music Group**. As the Patio's reputation grows, he hopes its roster can also expand.

"We're going to be having some amazing talent starting to come back through here again ... everyone who has performed here, some are gonna be returning," he said. "But we are also going to be bringing a lot of new talent that hasn't performed here because they've heard about it."



The inside of the Patio Theater at 6008 W. Irving Park Road as seen Oct. 4, 2022. Credit: Ariel Parrella-Aureli/Block Club Chicago



The Patio Theater's marquee is seen from the theater's green room on Oct. 4, 2022 in Portage Park. Credit: Ariel Parrella-Aureli/Block Club Chicago

The theater was built in 1927 by three brothers: William, John and George Mitchell. During its early years, the Patio screened movies like the silent film "[The Blonde Saint](#)" and was home to vaudeville performers and the eight-member Patio Symphony Orchestra.

Neighbors have been [hoping to see the theater thrive again](#) after closing and reopening several times [under different owners](#) in the last eight years. Chris Touwaide, co-owner of [Bistro 6050](#) at 6050 W. Irving Park Road who also lives on the block, said Bauman has been a good neighbor who can help revive the Portage Park strip.

Touwaide, who has a background in architecture, said he is happy Bauman is working to preserve "the wonderful, well-known landmark in the Portage Park" area.

"It will attract more people in the area, especially at nighttime," Touwaide said. "I am happy that we are two people reviving the neighborhood with the late openings."

Bistro 6050 recently changed its hours to be open late after the owners saw more customers coming between 9-11 p.m., they [previously told Block Club](#).

## ‘We’re Really Feeding The Community’

The Patio Theater also plans to relaunch its membership program, which started during the pandemic but had trouble getting off the ground, Bauman said. Members will get free and discounted concert tickets, unlimited access to all Patio Theater-sponsored movies and members-only events.

The theater’s website will be updated as more acts are booked, Bauman said.

Despite the pandemic slowing down plans, Bauman said he is committed to restoring the historic structure, and making it a mainstay for the community and the city’s independent music scene — especially as other historic theaters such as the Portage Theater and the Congress Theater have not yet reopened due to ownership and financial setbacks.

“All of these buildings should be protected,” he said. “I think the model is you can’t shut these things down — you shut them down, they fall apart. And so you need to keep them operating with the right people.”



Patio Theater owner Chris Bauman sits in the theater’s main green room upstairs behind a mural painted by a local artist. Credit: Ariel Parrella-Aureli/Block Club Chicago



The Patio Theater's historic marquee has been clipped by passing trucks several times in recent years. Credit: Alex Hernandez/Block Club Chicago

Bauman plans to continue renovations as he saves more money and revenue starts to flow again. On the to-do list is replacing the marquee that is routinely damaged by turning trucks on Irving Park Road and fixing the theater's original organ, which still sits inside the theater.

Another big project is bringing back the theater's cloud sky, small lights on the ceiling that were made to look like the night sky turned on when people came to view shows and digest the news before TVs were commonplace.

Bauman believes the cloud sky hasn't been active in over 50 years but wants to light it up again.

“Despite trucks hitting the marquee, we're really doing great events here and we're doing awesome movies and we're really feeding the community, both traditionally, like what people grew up coming here for, but also bringing a whole new generation to Patio Theater and to experience that and build their own once-in-a-lifetime experiences,” Bauman said.

“I think there are very few times in life that time stops, and it definitely stops here. I like creating those sanctuaries for that.”

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