

The Nickelodeon Theater

1607 Main Street, Columbia, SC 29201

Movieline: (803) 254-3433

Office: (803) 254-8234

www.nickelodeon.org

3:00 until the last film ends

April 2, 2016

Executive Summary by Suzannah McEntire

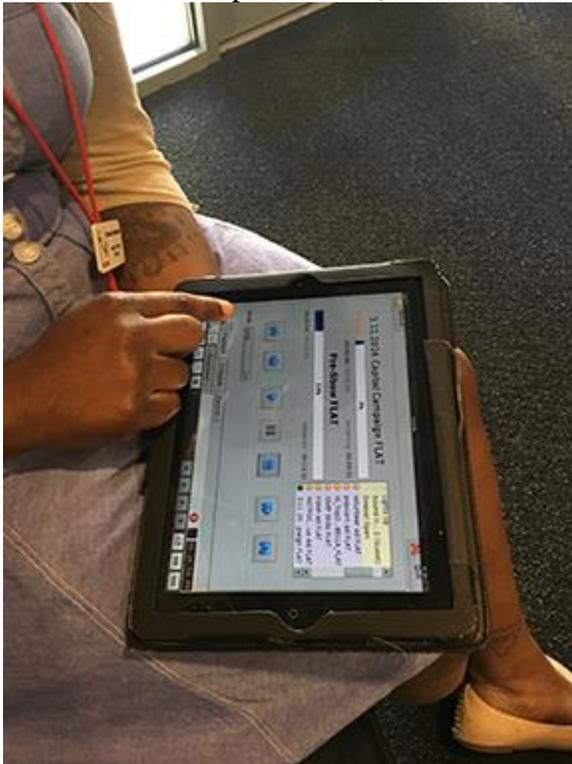


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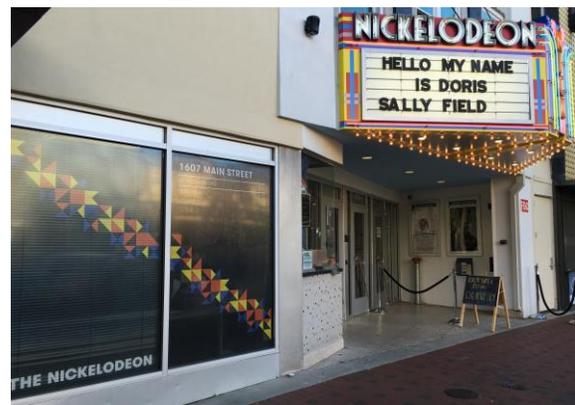
Overview

The Nickelodeon Theater, endearingly nicknamed The Nick, is South Carolina's only community art house theater founded in 1979 by Carl Davis and Linda O'Connor, two University of South Carolina students. Soon the organization became a gathering place for critical discussions and lovers of film. Featuring foreign and independent films, this was not your average theater. The original location was a converted bank with one screen but the new location boasts two screens allowing staggered viewing times. One advantage this art house theater has over other theaters locally is the license to sell beer and wine along with popcorn and other goodies one might find at a traditional movie theater. In the beginning The Nick was adorningly run by volunteers and has been a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization since inception, supported by donations with over 2,000 members. The Nick also rents out the venue to large corporations and donors as another source of income.

Visiting the Nickelodeon one will find film viewing very different than your traditional movie watching experience. Students, military personnel, and members receive a discount and there is *Screen Speech* before every movie is played. During a *Screen Speech* a Nickelodeon staff member will talk about the art house theater, explain all the benefits of becoming a member such as reduced ticket prices, support of local cultural center, and free popcorn on Wednesdays, rules, show appreciation to patrons, and offer assistance all while holding an iPad. As the staff member exits the theater they use the iPad to start the film. All the films are digital and downloaded from a distributor to a server and then played over the digital projectors (D. Adedokun, personal communication April 2, 2016).



Night Manager Debra Adedokun shows me the iPad used to play films.



Street view of The Nickelodeon logo, box office, and marquee sign.

The Nickelodeon Theater is a member of the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture, the Art House Convergence, and the South Carolina Arts Alliance. The board of directors of the

Columbia Film Society as well as the roughly about twenty-five staff and seven interns provide oversight and organization of the art house theater. Current executive director, Andy Smith, joined the staff of The Nick in 2007 after receiving his master's degree in film, television, and digital media from the University of California Los Angeles. Smith also founded the Indie Grits Film Festival the same year, which showcases the Southeast's best low budget, do-it-yourself filmmaking, art, puppetry, food, and music.

Current curated series of films at The Nick are *First Friday Lowbrow Cinema Explosion*, which is curated by a local commissure of B rated movies. *DOCS NOW!* is another series at The Nick featuring documentaries followed by panel discussions curated by The Nick staff. Prominent local educators, scientists, and medical professionals introduce cult, classic, and documentary films in a national series The Nick participates in called *Science on Screen* (D. Adedokun, personal communication April 2, 2016). Each speaker uses the film to talk about current technological advances or scientific research allowing both learning and entertainment in the theater style setting.

The Move

In August of 2012 the Nickelodeon moved to the former Fox Theater on the opposite side of Main Street from its original location. A capital campaign for this move lasted seven years. As part of Columbia's revitalization and growth of Main Street The Nick received significant funding for the move through governmental resources such as the City of Columbia and Richland County, local corporations such as Blue Cross Blue Shield of South Carolina, Bank of America, and First Citizens bank. Foundations such as the Ford Foundation, Nord Family Foundation and individual donors also contributed to the funding for the move and renovations of the art house theater (A. Smith, Personal communication March 29, 2016). Since the move attendance has grown 100 percent and membership has doubled. The operating budget for the Nickelodeon Theater has grown from \$350,000 to 1.2 million since 2011.

More than a movie Theater

Since its inception The Nick has served as a critically important community-gathering place for discussion and engagement in community of both local and worldly concerns. In my interview with Andy Smith I asked about cultural and civic contributions to the community and he stated:

There are fewer and fewer places where people are encouraged to gather in public and share thoughts and ideas. That's what we're best at. Sometimes it's purely for fun, but other times these conversations center around important issues like sexual abuse in the church, racial issues, or the struggle for equality for LGBT citizens (A. Smith, Personal communication March 29, 2016).



Helen Hill Media Education Center located behind theater 1 at the Nickelodeon Theater.

Smith also spoke about one of his major sources of pride since the move to the new location and that is the new education program. For the last three years educational programming at The Nick include an afterschool education program *Come Around My Way* that has partnered with a local high school, C.A. Johnson, that teaches basic documentary production skills to students at their school (J. Bennett, personal communication April 2, 2016). This year there has also been an after school program specifically launched for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer teens in the area called *Take Make Break*. Collaborative workshops, *Take Make Break*, and other adult classes are held onsite at the Nickelodeon in the *Helen Hill Media Education Center* located behind the downstairs theater screen (J. Bennett, personal communication April 2, 2016).



Jessa Bennett and Debra Adedokun pose in the Helen Hill Media Education Center.

Indie Grits

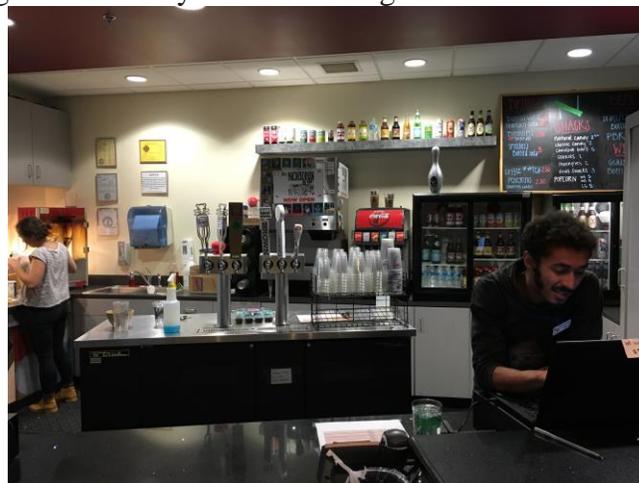
The growth that the Nickelodeon has experienced since 2011 has also grown the Indie Grits Film Festival and “it was named one of the 20 Coolest Film Festivals in the World twice by *Moviemaker Magazine*” (A. Smith, Personal communication March 29, 2016). The Indie Grits Film Festival founded by Smith in 2007 pulls together independent filmmakers and media-makers from around the Southeast in an open call for submissions. The festival is held throughout the downtown area in open street venues, galleries, the Columbia Museum of Art, and alternative spaces like a shipping container set as a theater and of course the heart of the festival the Nickelodeon Theater. A first for the home grow festival the growth of the Nickelodeon and a grant has allowed for this year’s 10th anniversary 2016 Indie Grits to be completely free. Indie Grits 2016 has the theme of Waterlines highlighting the rivers that flow through our city. Although this theme was decided sometime last year it became more potent and relevant since the devastating and historic flooding in Columbia just five months ago in the October of 2015.

The Future

While interviewing Smith about challenges of the organization he stated:

The biggest challenges relate to the ever-changing state of media consumption. Movie theaters have proved durable for a very long time, but I have concerns about how/if traditional film distribution models can persist with VOD, Netflix, etc. This uncertainty has pushed us to make sure our organization does a lot more than just show movies so that we remain valuable and relevant to the community (A. Smith, Personal communication March 29, 2016).

Smith also mentioned the planned construction of a new multiplex in downtown Columbia that poses a direct threat The Nickelodeon Theater’s business. To stay relevant in the age of streaming video and movies at home The Nick has evolved to include such things as live music played in front of screens while films play above and facilitated discussions before and after films or events as well a guest curators and special series. The Nickelodeon has created community cultural site of socially conscious members who come together and discuss ideas and issues important locally and globally. With the support of corporate donors, sponsors, and members The Nick has grown beyond just a place to see small release and independent films to a cultural hub of engaged community members in a globalized world.



Nickelodeon staff work concessions, which include beer and wine sales.

Author Note

All information gathered for this executive summary was done so through personal communication with executive director Andy Smith, night manager Deborah Adedokun and assistant instructor Jessa Bennett.