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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Nice work, Joyce. I thought the exposition about the Latchis corporate structure derailed the lede, so I did a little nudging.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

Reinventing a Brattleboro institution

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

With movie attendance sharply down, the Latchis  
Theatre pivots to live events and community engagement

####END SUBHED####

TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

Remember when going to the movies was what people  
did on a weekend? Jon Potter does.

Potter, who is responsible for the Latchis Theatre, calls  
those days the “Seinfeld School of Moviegoing.”

“There were so many episodes of *Seinfeld* where they  
would all gather in Jerry’s apartment on Friday evening to figure

11 out their plans,” Potter said of the television comedy show that  
12 ran from 1989 to 1998 and its four protagonists.

13 “Someone would say, ‘Let’s go to the movies.’ And they  
14 went, without having any idea what they were going to see until  
15 they got there. That doesn’t happen anymore.”

16 Potter is the executive director of Latchis Corporation  
17 and Latchis Arts, Inc., the two entities that respectively own and  
18 operate the Latchis Memorial Building in Brattleboro. In his care  
19 is the Latchis Theatre, an Art Deco masterpiece of a movie  
20 theater, as well as the 30-room Latchis Hotel and stores, office  
21 spaces for rent, and a restaurant.

22 Since the pandemic, movie theaters across the nation  
23 have reported a significant decline in attendance: between 40%  
24 and 46%. At the Latchis, it is a dramatic 50% audience loss over  
25 10 years.

26 “For every movie theater in the country, including the  
27 Latchis, business is way down from a decade ago,” Potter said.  
28 “And I’m pretty convinced that it’s not coming back.”

29 Movies now have to be an event, a destination, or  
30 something special, not a fallback position for an evening’s  
31 entertainment.

32 “You have to have a reason to leave your home and  
33 choose a specific movie to go to,” Potter said. “Our challenge at  
34 the Latchis is to create as many reasons for people to make us  
35 their destination as possible. We want to continue to be a  
36 showcase for first-run and indie films that fit the bill.

37 “People get excited about *Wicked* and *Marty Supreme*  
38 and *One Battle After Another*. Cinema is still a powerful art form.  
39 But there are other compelling options competing for people’s  
40 attention.”

41 What caused such a precipitous drop in attendance? Was  
42 it the pandemic, when people no longer wanted to be in  
43 enclosed places with strangers? Or streaming, when a large  
44 volume of first-class entertainment became available in people’s  
45 living rooms? Have demographics played a part? People in

46 Windham County are getting older, and driving at night can be a  
47 problem for older moviegoers.

48 "The pandemic was certainly an accelerator," Potter said.

49 "But I think the trend had already begun just before the  
50 pandemic, as streaming platforms came more and more online.  
51 So in some ways, the pandemic sort of locked it in and  
52 accelerated the trend.

53 "People got out of the habit of going to the movies," he  
54 continued. "People got into the habit of seeing amazing content  
55 in their living rooms. And all those platforms are putting out great  
56 stuff."

57 That audiences choose to stay home is not the full story  
58 behind the attendance drop at the Latchis. Slowly and stealthily,  
59 the Brattleboro area has become a center of performing arts. For  
60 example, Next Stage Arts in Putney and the New England Youth  
61 Theatre, Epsilon Spires, the Stone Church, and the Vermont Jazz  
62 Center in Brattleboro are all regularly presenting live  
63 entertainment, and they are all competing for the entertainment  
64 dollar.

65 "The Latchis is lucky, from a certain standpoint," Potter  
66 said. "Because of the hotel, we celebrate and benefit greatly from  
67 having those other great things in our community. People come  
68 and stay with us and then go to the Stone Church."

## 69 **An unusual corporate structure**

70 The Latchis employs two dozen people, full and part  
71 time, most of them in housekeeping. It has a complex operating  
72 structure with two boards.

73 "We have a nonprofit organization that owns a for-profit  
74 corporation," Potter explained. "The hotel and the commercial  
75 contracts with the studios and the movie business, all parts of the  
76 theater, are under the corporate umbrella."

77 So are the leased spaces, whose tenants include Sages  
78 Pub; Evan James Jewelers; Express Fluency, a language school;  
79 and the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation, which

80 maintains a satellite office for workforce development. Those are  
81 all under the corporation's umbrella.

82 "The nonprofit does the fun stuff, like the partnerships to  
83 make live events happen," Potter said. "They do the fundraising  
84 to help support those live events. The large capital campaign that  
85 did the seats and the ceiling — that was led by the nonprofit.  
86 We're very lucky here that the two entities play very well  
87 together.

88 "My position would be completely untenable if there  
89 was a turf war, but it's a very respectful, mutual relationship," he  
90 added.

91 The hotel drives the rest of the businesses.

92 "People identify us with the theater, but the real engine  
93 that keeps the building going is the hotel," Potter said. "Local  
94 people today don't even know that we have a hotel. And business  
95 in the hotel has been growing and essentially supporting  
96 everything that's happening here."

## 97 **The future is live**

98 With the movie audience shrinking, Potter and his two  
99 boards have had to figure out a viable path for the future. After  
100 much strategic planning in sessions and in private conversations,  
101 they decided to do more — much more — of what they had  
102 already been doing: live events.

103 "If the amount of your pie shrinks, you don't shrink the  
104 pie to meet what you have left," Potter said. "You try to fill in the  
105 empty slices, if you can accept that rather lame metaphor."

106 The Latchis had already been hosting live events, special  
107 events, and special programs.

108 "When you talk to people who come here and love the  
109 Latchis, the nights that they really remember are the Sing Nowells  
110 and the a cappella concerts and the big shows," Potter said. "So  
111 we already had the chops."

112 The new formula is working. The Latchis calendar is now  
113 full of live events.

114           There's a yearly Wagner in Vermont festival, produced by  
115 Tundi Productions, the nonprofit led by Hugh Keelan and Jenna  
116 Rae, which takes up the main theater for a month and draws its  
117 audience from all over the country. In a bout of synergy, many of  
118 the attendees also rent rooms in the hotel.

119           In 2025, there was live music from touring musicians  
120 such as Leo Kottke, Cherish the Ladies, and Livingston Taylor.

121           There were independent films that included audience  
122 question-and-answer sessions with such creators as English  
123 screenwriter and director Mike Leigh. There have been many film  
124 festivals, many offering discussions afterward by the films'  
125 creators.

126           And of course, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, a 1975  
127 film that has turned into a full audience participation ritual,  
128 remains a late-night staple.

129           Although the Bolshoi Ballet seems to have stopped  
130 livestreaming, the Latchis still simulcasts live performances from  
131 the Metropolitan Opera.

132           And there were many local events. The Brattleboro  
133 School of Dance did *The Nutcracker* at Christmas. Sandglass  
134 Theater's Puppets in the Green Mountains festival took over in  
135 September. The Brattleboro Concert Choir, the Windham  
136 Philharmonic, and Sing Nowell all did shows at the Latchis.

137           There were live professional comedy shows by  
138 comedians like Michael Cruz Kayne and Paula Poundstone.

139           And there were many political evenings organizing  
140 community discussions centered around films about the war in  
141 Ukraine and the Israel/Gaza war.

142           "I think the re-election of Donald Trump was another  
143 thought provoking moment for me," Potter said. "It really  
144 changed my thinking around what a theater could and should be  
145 doing in this moment."

146           He asked himself: "How do we meet a moment that's  
147 really tough and stressful, particularly on our 'Blue' community,  
148 but on our country as a whole?"

149            “So I began to think of the Latchis as not just a  
150 marketplace of cinema, but as a place where the First  
151 Amendment lived and breathed,” Potter said. “It could be a  
152 marketplace of ideas and conversation and democracy and  
153 helping people figure out the world.”

154            People wanted meaning. They wanted conversation. They  
155 wanted to be together, even if it was to deal with difficult issues.

156            “So thinking of the Latchis in terms of a pretty crucial  
157 place for people to get together and express and talk about ideas  
158 and concepts and to really be thinking beyond cinema —  
159 anything that the First Amendment might champion — was very  
160 important to me,” Potter said. “And I think that’s been part of  
161 what our success has been.”

162            For example, the Latchis screened what might be  
163 considered a pro-Putin film about the Ukraine war.

164            “It was a different telling of the Russian invasion of the  
165 Ukraine, of the more pro-Putin version of things,” Potter said.

166            “Oliver Stone was involved in it. We had people walk out, and  
167 we had other people push back, but for me it was important to  
168 show it.”

## 169            **Finding new partners,** 170 **approaches**

171            All told, the main stage was used for more than 90 live  
172 performances in 2025. Going into 2026, Potter has already  
173 booked more than 30 until September, with many more on the  
174 way.

175            “We have a relationship with the Stone Church now  
176 where, if they ever land somebody who’s too big for their hall,  
177 they’ll pitch us,” Potter said. “We’re working on establishing  
178 relationships with people who are booking venues in  
179 Northampton and other other places.”

180            People frequently bring programming ideas to the  
181 Latchis.

182            “They come to us still and again,” Potter said. “I think  
183 work begets work. When the word is out that the Latchis is very  
184 interested in doing more live events, or having more independent  
185 filmmakers, then the woodwork comes alive.”

186            For one example, Potter was talking to Danny  
187 Lichtenfeld, the executive director of the Brattleboro Museum  
188 and Art Center. He recommended an independent film, *Secret*  
189 *Mall Apartment*, about artists in Providence who lived in a secret  
190 apartment in a mall for several years.

191            Lichtenfeld connected Potter and the film’s producer and  
192 director, Jeremy Workman, “and off we went,” Potter said.

193            “And that was the ninth best movie of 2025 in terms of  
194 sales for us, which was astounding,” he noted. “I think it’s proof  
195 of our amazingly unique community that a sleepy little  
196 documentary like that outsold *Avatar*. It kind of gives you  
197 encouragement.”

198            Potter also rents out one of the small theaters to family  
199 groups, a program that began during the pandemic to offer a  
200 cinematic experience to quarantine bubbles. Groups can enjoy  
201 films and even use the screen and the theater’s technology to play  
202 video games.

203            “We did about 800 private rentals,” Potter said. “People  
204 just came out of the woodworks for that. We did more kids’  
205 birthday parties than Chuck E. Cheese ever did.”

206            So is not just blockbuster movies with muscled men in  
207 tights saving the world any more — although it is that, too.

208            “It’s a conscious choice and programming decision,”  
209 Potter said of the balance between the live programming and the  
210 first-run movies. “I don’t think of it as doing much more that’s  
211 different, except that we’re doing much more of it.”

212            “If you step out of the box that you’re in, if you put your  
213 toe out of the box enough times, you begin to realize that the box  
214 isn’t really relevant anymore,” Potter said. “And I think, in some  
215 ways, that’s what we’ve been doing.”

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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