

Ruth to get 5 years in federal prison for weapons charge

Felon had planned a ‘final showdown’ with local cops

By **JARED STRONG**
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A 37-year-old Jefferson man who claimed he was “really, really high” on drugs when he plotted a shootout with law enforcement officers pleaded guilty this

month to possessing an unregistered firearm, court records show. Tyson Ruth faced five federal weapons charges that stemmed from a local investigation into his possession of firearms and a plan to kill officers in a “final showdown.”

Ruth is a felon who, along with his wife, were accused of a string of burglaries in several counties last year. The two allegedly drove around with two-way radios, hammers, a police dispatch scanner, camouflaged clothing, binoculars and flashlights they used to commit the crimes. They were arrested in late December when a police informant

in Carroll bought a sawed-off shotgun from them. The informant said the Ruths had acquired body armor, numerous firearms and ammunition and had the makings of an explosive and a biological weapon. Subsequent searches of their Jefferson house and other family property found four more firearms — another sawed-off shotgun, two pistols and a rifle,

according to court records. Ruth told The Jefferson Herald in a jailhouse interview that he did not actually plan to attack police officers — even though he hates them — and that his ramblings about an attack were the result of his extensive drug use. The federal charge to which he pleaded guilty has a total maximum punishment of 10 years in prison, but under a plea agree-

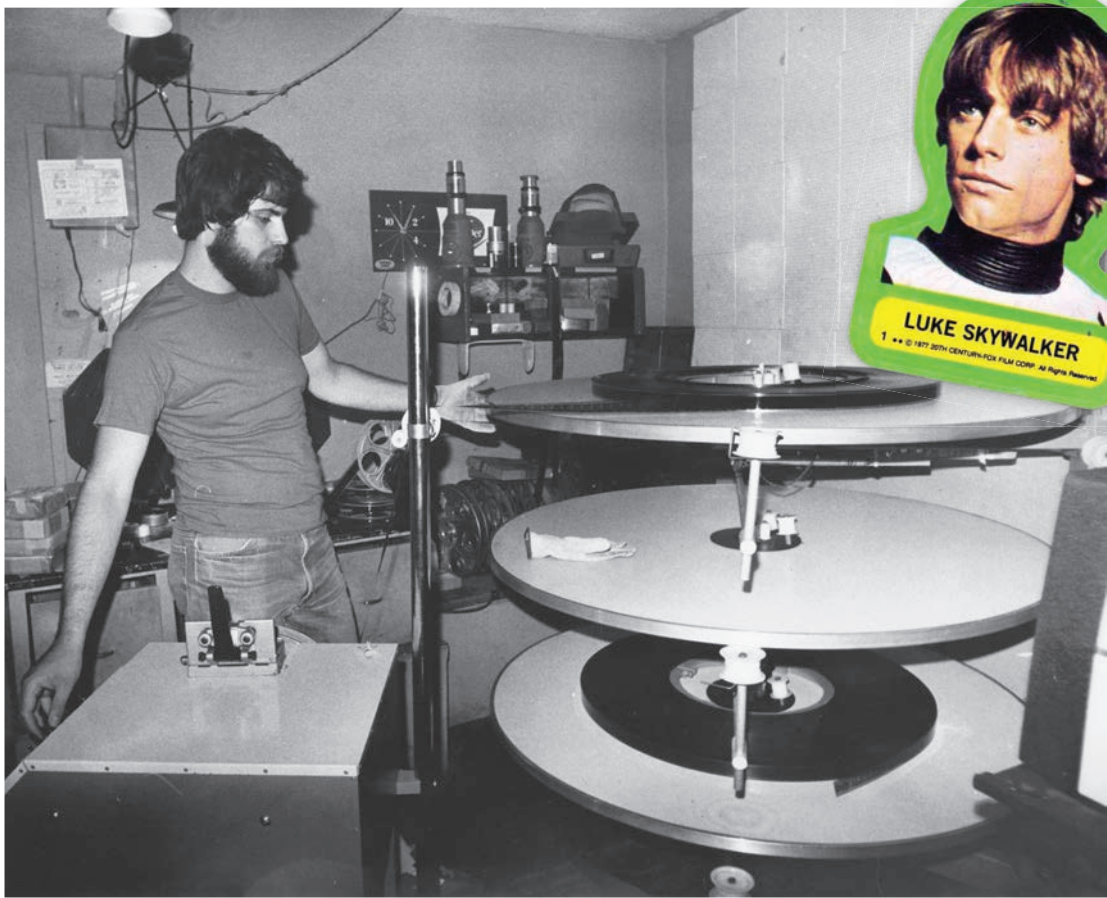
ment prosecutors will recommend a prison term of five years when Ruth is sentenced. A sentencing hearing is set for March. Ruth is incarcerated in an eastern Iowa prison for his recent criminal convictions in Dallas and Greene counties and is set to be released in July 2019. It's unclear when his federal imprisonment might begin.

Whatever Happened To ...




THE ORIGINAL BELIEVER

Dennis Lynch managed the Sierra during ‘Star Wars,’ and is now on record as writing the first fan letter Lucasfilm ever received



Then-manager Dennis Lynch assembles the 35mm print of the original “Star Wars” onto the platter system at the Sierra Theatre in Jefferson in August 1977. TOP: Lynch sketched these images Labor Day weekend of 1976 based on what he saw at the World Science Fiction Convention in Kansas City, where he also met a still-unknown Mark Hamill. “Star Wars” wouldn’t hit theaters until May 25, 1977. Today, early images like these would break the internet.



ANDREW MCGINN
MCGINN AGAIN

These days, being a “Star Wars” fan is no more bizarre — no more or less ostracizing — than being a fan of the Cyclones or Hawkeyes.

There are even T-shirts that combine the two, like one for kids with Darth Vader emblazoned on it that touts, “I Am A Cyclone Like My Father Before Me.” (I’m a lifelong ISU fan, but I couldn’t help but think when I saw that shirt, “Great, now the Cyclones can choke with the simple pointing of a finger.”)

Who would have ever thought we’d see the day when geek culture and jock culture are one? Geek culture is now as mainstream as, well, a story on Page 1 of your local newspaper.

So let’s have a little fun with some “Star Wars” trivia.

We’re about a month shy of the new “Star Wars” movie, “The Last Jedi” (officially, Episode VIII). Locally, there will be no wait. The Sierra Community Theatre will be opening the movie with a special showing Dec. 14. Tickets are already on sale.

Here are four questions designed to test your “Star Wars” knowledge. Answer them all incorrectly and, “I find your lack of faith disturbing.” Get them all right, “Great, kid! Don’t get cocky.”

1. In the original “Star Wars,” where did they film the Tatooine des-



- ert scenes?
2. What was Luke Skywalker’s last name originally going to be?
3. Boba Fett made his screen debut, not in “The Empire Strikes Back” in 1980, but in what?
4. Who managed the Sierra Theatre in the summer of 1977, when “Star Wars” came to Jefferson?
- The answers: 1. Tunisia; 2. Starkiller; 3. an animated segment during “The Star Wars Holiday Special,” the franchise’s 1978 garbage-chute-fire of a TV special (there are no dumpsters in outer space); 4. Dennis Lynch.
- Question No. 4 is oddly local, I realize. But 40 years after “Star Wars” began to remake geek culture as mainstream American culture, the story can now be told of how the one-time manager of our local theater obtained a special place in Lucasfilm history.
- Now 65 and retired from teaching in his native Cedar Rapids, Lynch is the No. 1 original “Star Wars” fan.
- That was verified this year by no less than Pete Vilmur, head of fan relations at Lucasfilm, the company George Lucas founded in 1971 (and acquired by Disney in 2012 for a cool \$4.06 billion).
- A lot of us claim to be big “Star Wars” fans. And in the hierarchy of fandom, I’m a bigger fan than my 9-year-old son, who can claim he’s a big fan, but I saw “Return of the Jedi” in first-run. Lynch, on the other hand, can say he was a “Star Wars” fan going back to 1976.
- That’s like saying you were a mem-

STAR WARS, PAGE 5

Construction gets underway on new Paton city hall

No completion date set as base poured

By **BRANDON HURLEY**
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PATON — The concrete base is set and excitement throughout one Greene County town is brewing. Paton is getting a new City Hall.

Initial construction began last week at the location just behind the public library at the intersection of State and Main streets.

The old Paton City Hall, which was physically attached to the rear of the public library, had run its course. It was outdated.

The new concrete base was poured and solidified early this

week with finishing touches set for Friday. The base structure will begin to take form next week.

The buzz around the quiet town has created a stir. “Anytime you have a new building, there’s excitement,” said Paton city council member Judy Wilson. “We are on a roll here.”

Vaughn Bauer, of Bauer Built Manufacturing, who has already remade much of Paton, has been tasked with handling the construction.

The project has sparked the interest of the council and the town as well.



Work on the new Paton City Hall is underway behind the public library. Structural construction will begin next week. BRANDON HURLEY | JEFFERSON HERALD

“It benefits us immensely,” Wilson said. “I’m a Paton na-

tive. I was part of the last class from Paton. My dad was a depot manager. I’m a big-time supporter of Paton.”

She’s also helped spearhead park projects and other beautification programs throughout the community.

Paton, a town of less than 300 in northeastern Greene County, is hoping to emphatically insert itself into a countywide makeover.

Paton factors heavily into Greene County’s Vision 2020, a sweeping, countywide development plan, in that it could be the site of innovative, 3D-printed workforce housing.

Paton could be the first rural area to introduce such housing. A new City Hall is a perfect starting point.

“My motto is ‘Push for Paton,’” the 73-year old said. “We are a small county and we have to hang tough. It’s like in that movie, ‘If you build it, they will come.’”

City offices are temporarily located in a trailer across the street from the construction site, and are open from noon to 3 p.m. Mondays, as well as Wednesdays and Fridays from 8:30 a.m. to noon. To reach the city offices, call 515-968-4533.

No completion date has been set as construction workers dodge impending snow and inclement weather.

Details regarding cost and total dimensions were not available at press time.

STAR WARS

FROM PAGE 1

ber of the Kiss Army clear back in 1971, when Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley were still in a band called Wicked Lester.

By the time Lynch moved to Jefferson in the spring of '77 to manage the Sierra for then-owner Bob Fridley, not only had he seen props and costumes from the forthcoming movie with his own eyes (including the Darth Vader costume, the C-3PO suit and R2-D2), but he had personally corresponded with Mark Hamill, the actor playing Luke Skywalker whose life was about to change forever.

"My expectation," Lynch recalled this week, "was this could be as good as '2001.'"

At the time, 1968's "2001: A Space Odyssey" was as good as science-fiction got on the big screen.

The letter Lynch wrote to Hamill on Jan. 5, 1977 — praising the "Star Wars" teaser trailer that had been released to theaters that Christmas — somehow wound up in the Lucasfilm archives as the earliest fan letter ever pertaining to "Star Wars."

Lucasfilm, which still has the letter (plus the envelope adorned with Lynch's sketch of an X-wing fighter), reprinted it this year in the commemorative guide to "Star Wars Celebration," a mega-convention for fans held in Orlando, Fla., in April.

May (May 25, to be exact) marked the 40th anniversary of the release of "Star Wars" (er, Episode IV) to the nation's theaters.

A 1974 graduate of the University of Iowa with a degree in film, Lynch was already managing the Sierra by May 25, 1977, having learned from Fridley himself about the need for someone to manage his theater here.



Denny Lynch

"I thought that would be fun to run a real movie theater," Lynch said.

He personally saw "Star Wars" for the first time the afternoon before its Des Moines premiere during a test run of the 70mm print at Fridley's River Hills theater (the same place I would later see "Return of the Jedi").

He was one of just three people present.

"It was magnificent," he said.

Lynch would have to hold Jefferson fans at bay until Aug. 11, when "Star Wars" finally opened at the Sierra for an extended, two-week run.

"I'm telling everyone I know that 'Star Wars' is going to be the biggest movie ever released," he recalled. "And no one believes me except for a friend who designed computer chips."

That friend went so far as to buy stock in 20th Century Fox.

By Aug. 23, Page 1 of the Jefferson Bee was proclaiming, "Science fiction fans flock to theater in 'Star Wars' box office blitz."

In the story, Lynch provided the super-fan's perspective on the movie.

He broke down the movie's special effects, and revealed that James Earl Jones was the voice of "Lord Darth Vader" (even though he was uncredited).

He went on to explain that Vader in earlier times had battled Skywalker's father "and was thrown into a volcano where he was severely disfigured. Hence he wears the iron lung and mask."

Close.

Lynch also predicted that one or more sequels were being planned.

Spot on.

As theater manager, Lynch was fond of running movie trivia contests in the paper — hence my earlier trivia questions.

With free movie passes up for grabs, the Aug. 30 Jefferson Bee carried his "Star Wars"-themed trivia contest. The questions ranged in difficulty from what kind of being is Chewbacca to what was the name of C-3PO's former master.

In earlier contests, he wanted to know stuff like who played the fighter pilot who napalms the giant mutated spider in 1955's "Tarantula."

With that one, he may as well have been asking, Monty Python-style, "What is the air-speed velocity of an unladen swallow?"

In those pre-internet days, most people were presumably dumbfounded. (The answer to that last one, by the way, is Clint Eastwood in an uncredited role as the jet squadron leader; I cheated and went to IMDb.)

In all, though, more than 2,000

Whatever Happened To ... "Whatever Happened To" is an occasional series in The Jefferson Herald devoted to catching up with those people who have made life in Greene County a little more interesting. Contact Andrew McGinn at a.mcginn@beeherald.com or 515-386-4161.

people managed to see "Star Wars" in Jefferson — some of them returning three and four times, Lynch told the Bee.

It was the beginning of a sea change in our culture.

"That was a magical time," Lynch said 40 years later. "I had this terrible feeling it would be a long time before we saw something like this again."

Lynch, who retired a couple of years ago as a computer drafting instructor at Center Point-Urbana High School in Linn County, said he recently looked back at the 25 top movies of 1970. At best, only four could be described as fantasy or having some kind of fantastical element.

Last year, he said, 23 of the 25 top films were sci-fi or fantasy.

"There's been a huge cultural shift," he said. "'Star Wars' has opened it up to a much wider audience."

The early days of fandom

In the beginning, though, sci-fi fans were few and far between, especially out here in the sticks. What Uncle Owen, a farmer, says of Obi-Wan in "Star Wars" might have applied to sci-fi fans as well: "That wizard is just a crazy old man."

Lynch had been able to attend his first sci-fi convention in 1973 in Los Angeles while as a student at Iowa. The campus movie theater footed his bus ticket.

"I didn't know about science fiction conventions," he said. "It was overwhelming."

On hand was a who's who of geek gods.

There were writers like Ray Bradbury, Harlan Ellison (who wrote the best-ever episode of "Star Trek," 1967's "The City on the Edge of Forever") and Richard Matheson (who wrote some of the greatest episodes of "The Twilight Zone").

There were movie pioneers like Marcel Delgado, the artist who sculpted the stop-motion model of King Kong in 1933, and George Pal, who produced "The War of the Worlds" in 1953.

There were movie stars like Christopher Lee, Hammer Films' Dracula, whom Lynch literally ran into while rounding a corner.

"I'm 6'3," Lynch said. "He's 6'5."

The whole experience was a revelation.

"Nobody was charging for autographs," he said. "It was a small audience at that point."

Lynch returned to Iowa and has been an organizer of ICON in Cedar Rapids, the state's longest-running sci-fi and fantasy convention, since its beginnings in 1975.

What pushed Lynch toward his date with "Star Wars" destiny was the 34th World Science Fiction Convention, held Labor Day weekend of 1976 in Kansas City.

There, 20th Century Fox planned to promote some space movie no one knew much about called "The Star Wars."

A room at the convention was set up with costumes, props, models of starships and concept artwork.

Lynch was blown away.

"This is a real, lived-in place," he remembers thinking of the universe Lucas was bringing to life. "Nobody had ever done that before."

Always before, ships and uniforms in sci-fi movies were spotless. The way they gleamed seemed to suggest that, in the future, nothing will ever be dirty.

Lynch had a camera with him and desperately wanted to snap what he was seeing, but couldn't — photography was off limits. So he did the next best thing, drawing in his sketchbook what he saw all around him.

The result? Accurate depictions of Darth Vader, the movie's droids and several ships, all rendered nearly nine months before the rest of the world knew anything about "Star Wars."

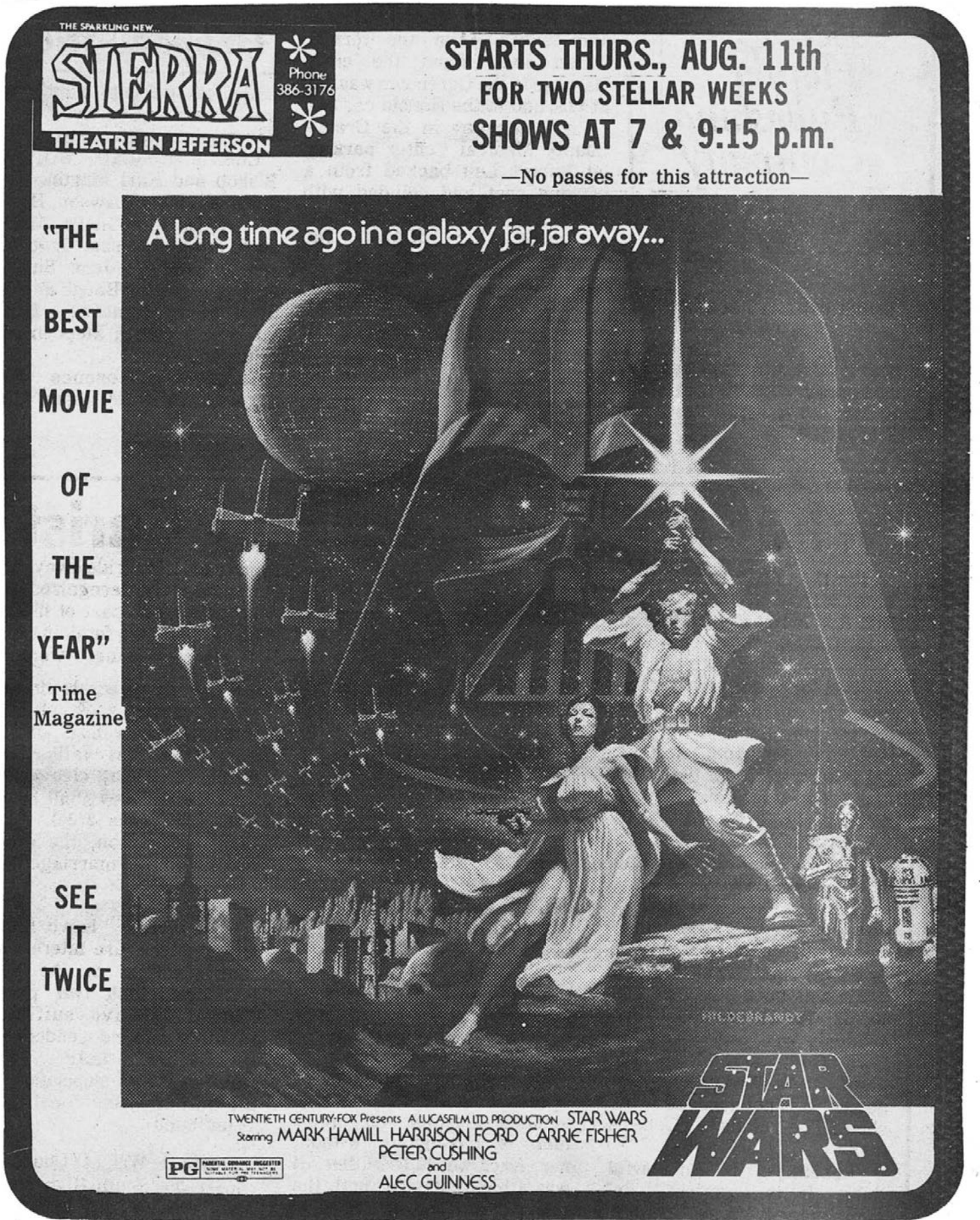
The sight of Lynch sketching piqued the curiosity of a guy his age.

"He said, 'Hi, I'm Mark Hamill,'" Lynch said.

Hamill was stunned that Lynch had taken such interest in the display.

"He was the best possible ambassador Lucas ever could have asked for," Lynch said. "He was happy to meet fans like me."

The two even hung out that night in the hotel, Hamill autographing one of two "Star Wars" posters Lynch bought



Now 66, Mark Hamill reprises his role as Luke Skywalker after 34 years next month in "Star Wars: The Last Jedi." At age 25 in January 1977, he received a letter (below) from an Iowan named Denny Lynch. The letter wound up in the archives at Lucasfilm as the earliest "Star Wars" fan letter. Lynch was manager of the Sierra Theatre when "Star Wars" came to Jefferson.



by comic book artist Howard Chaykin.

Today, that 1976 poster — "Star Wars" Poster 1 — is worth a ton.

Lynch gave away the signed one to his then-girlfriend.

"I haven't seen her in 30 years," he said.

He now finds himself wondering, "Did she keep it? Does she know it's worth at least \$2,000?"

By January, Lynch was dashing off his critique of the "Star Wars" trailer to Hamill. Without an address, he wrote to Mark Hamill "in care of project STAR WARS" at 20th Century Fox in Hollywood.

"The robots looked fine," Lynch reported to Hamill, "and the audience laughed at the shot of Artoo Deetoo falling over." Lynch also noted some criti-

cism in fan circles of the novel adaptation of "Star Wars," published in late 1976 by Ballantine Books.

Hamill wrote back in a letter postmarked Feb. 14, 1977 (what was likely the last lonely Valentine's Day for our future Jedi master).

"About your friends who thought that the book was less than a great work of science fiction," Hamill wrote to Lynch, "I hope they can enjoy STAR WARS for what it is — light escapist fantasy adventure."

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND sounds more like what they are waiting for. I'm really looking forward to it and it will probably be more highly regarded by science fiction fans and critics alike because it's serious and handled in a realistic, 'this

could really happen' way."

And that was it. Hamill went on to stardom, and Lynch went on to show Hamill's movie in Jefferson.

Lynch's stay in Jefferson wouldn't be long, and he would be succeeded as manager by Carolyn Ott.

By year's end, in fact, Lynch was beginning to think he wasn't a good fit for a town like Jefferson.

"I was a complete outsider," he said.

Throughout 1977, he had tried a series of Midnight Monster Movies on Fridays at the Sierra, but it seemed hardly anyone else was interested in seeing "The Abominable Dr. Phibes" with Vincent Price or "Blood From the Mummy's Tomb."

"A curse on those who don't come," Lynch wrote in his ad

for "The Abominable Dr. Phibes."

"By and large," he said, "it was a complete and utter failure. We would get anywhere from two to five people."

The stake through Lynch's heart would come the month following "Star Wars."

"A month later," he explained, "'Smokey and the Bandit' came out. I hated almost everything in the film. I did virtually nothing for 'Smokey and the Bandit.'"

In other words, there were no "Smokey and the Bandit" trivia contests to be found in the Bee or Herald.

In Jefferson, that hardly mattered.

"It made about twice as much as 'Star Wars,'" Lynch said. "At that point, I realized my taste in movies was not the popular taste."