

Los Angeles Times

Screening Room

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The Laemmle Theaters' Documentary Days series continues at the Sunset 5 with Saturday, Sunday and Monday 10 a.m. screenings of the irresistible "Drive-In Movie Memories," directed by Kurt Kuenne. It's based on the book of the same name by the film's producers, Don and Susan Sanders, as well as their other book, "American Drive-In Movie Theater."

Steeped in nostalgia for a simpler, more innocent and communal time, "Drive-In Movie Memories" is amazingly comprehensive and chock-full of information for a film that clocks in at 58 minutes.

Camden, N.J., businessman R.J. Hollingshead Jr. opened the first drive-in on June 6, 1933; legend has it that he was inspired to do so

because Hollingshead Sr. was too obese to fit into theater seats.

It was a hit from the start, and drive-ins, mainly primitive mom-and-pop operations, began opening up all over the country. Drive-ins took off in a big way after World War II, becoming corporate ventures, with as many as 700 theaters opening in 1947 and 1948.

Television made a dent in what Variety dubbed "ozoners" just as it did "hardtops," but drive-ins got a new lease on life in the late '50s and early '60s when American International Pictures' Samuel Z. Arkoff and James Nicholson and others started making inexpensive exploitation movies expressly for teen audiences.

The rise of the shopping mall multiplex and the advent of the VCR did in drive-ins, but there has been a modest revival across the

country in recent years, with about 40 ozoners either reopened or newly constructed.

The film is laced with drive-in promotional trailers and archival materials, as well as the reminiscences of producers, exhibitors and distributors, plus such drive-in movie stars as Beverly Garland, Celeste Yarnall and Robert Fuller, who are represented by deliciously lurid trailers for their films.

"Drive-in Movie Memories" is as affectionate as it is informative, and a valuable work of social history and popular culture.

"Drive-In Movie Memories" will screen at 11 a.m. Sept. 7 and 8 at the Monica 4-Plex, Santa Monica, (310) 394-9741; Sept. 14 and 15 at the Playhouse 7, Pasadena, (626) 844-6500; and Sept. 21 and 22 at the Fallbrook, West Hills, (818) 340-8710.