

The Business

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There's No Price Lower Than Free

Landmark won't say why it canceled the Wal-Mart movie, but it's not hard to guess.

By Deanna Isaacs

The air was sweatshop-stifling last Sunday in a packed room at Acme Art Works, where Open University of the Left hosted a screening of the anti-Wal-Mart documentary *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*. A few people fled the unhealthy environment, but those who stayed through the 95-minute polemic may be glad they did: last week Landmark Theatres quietly canceled its nationwide commercial run for the film, which was to open in Chicago

Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price
WHEN Fri-Sat
11/18-11/19
PRICE Free
INFO See movie listings or walmartmovie.com for locations and times

December 16. Landmark has refused to explain, but it's a move bound to provoke speculation: did Wal-Mart stretch a giant tentacle and snatch the run? A Landmark spokesman would only say that the cancellation "has nothing to do with the content of the film." More likely, Internet DVD sales and thousands of free showings like the one at Acme were eating into the potential theater audience. Landmark, in effect, had been undersold.

The free showings, promoted at walmartmovie.com, are part of a grassroots campaign to create momentum for the film, a strategy director Robert Greenwald successfully exploited for his previous documentary, *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism*. The Wal-Mart film marshals an army of familiar charges against the giant retailer, beginning with the way it knocks out local businesses and ending with security problems in its parking lots. Greenwald's main point is that Wal-Mart's low prices are subsidized in numerous ways by taxpayers: according to the film, the federal government shells out an estimated \$1.5 billion annually to provide medical care and social services for the chain's 1.3 million U.S. employees, while local governments continue to provide hefty subsidies to bring new Wal-Marts to town. And then there are those \$3-a-day factory workers producing Wal-Mart products in



Scenes from *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*, director Robert Greenwald

China, and seamstresses in Bangladesh working for 13 cents an hour. More than 7,000 of the grassroots screenings were scheduled nationally this week, with some still to come in the Chicago area this weekend.

Wisdom Bridge Goes Condo?

Speaking of the elusive good deal, Wisdom Bridge Arts Project is about to announce that Rogers Park will get a new free community arts center—with a condominium attached. After years of dreaming, scheming, and persistence by the project's real-estate-savvy five-member board, WBAP has purchased the old Wisdom Bridge Theatre building near the Howard el station. Chairman Tom Rosenfeld says 49th Ward alderman Joe Moore helped them acquire the long-vacant structure for \$300,000. It's a major accomplishment for the nonprofit, which came together five years ago as an attempt by a few neighborhood residents to save the building, then slated to become a minimall. But

things have changed: they now plan on tearing the building down.

"In the last five years as an organization, we've learned a lot," Rosenfeld says of WBAP, which has been functioning as an "arts broker" in the neighborhood, sponsoring a theater camp, music festivals, and a gallery while placing a priority on programming for kids. "None of our plans have anything to do with the current building."

Though they still hope to capitalize on nostalgia for the second-floor theater space where Robert Falls led Wisdom Bridge Theatre to glory in the 70s and 80s, Rosenfeld says a decade of vacancy and neglect has turned the building into a water-damaged, mold-infested squatters' den—"unsafe, unsanitary, and unsalvageable." According to Rosenfeld, "Five years ago the cost to rehab the building was a little more than the cost to tear it down; now it's outrageously higher. We're talking with developers, pursuing a mixed-use development on the site."

The board is looking to cut a deal that will cover construction costs for a 10,000-square-foot community arts cen-



ter (to include classrooms, a gallery, and a 100-plus-seat theater) as part of any proposed development, such as a six-story residential condominium. WBAP board member Dan Alexander (who lived in Rogers Park five years ago but has since moved) works for the Illinois Facilities Fund, which will oversee the development process; they'll issue a request for proposals. Architect John Morris is in line to design the center, which might cost \$2.5 million; financing for the building purchase and preliminary expenses is coming from the Chicago Community Loan Fund. What's unusual here, Rosenfeld says, is "we'll do a capital campaign, but we won't have to wait for that [money] to make it happen. If it works, we think it will be a remarkable model of how you can utilize the value of the land to deliver—in this case—a community arts center." Anyone who wants to help can contact the project at wisdombridge@aol.com.


Had It With Acme

"We've had it," says Woman Made Gallery executive director Beate

Minkovski of the organization's abrupt departure this week from its home in the Acme Artists Community, the city-subsidized artists' co-op at 2418 W. Bloomingdale, which has been plagued by flooding and construction-related problems since it opened nearly three years ago. Woman Made fled to the first space a real estate agent showed them—685 N. Milwaukee, where they'll have more than 3,000 square feet on two floors, ARC Gallery and Intuit as neighbors, and, Minkovski hopes, a lot less hassle. "I'm sorry," she says. "We liked the concept of the artists' community; when we moved in we had great hopes. But the flooding, the problems people are having in the building, were interfering with our work. We were there three years and things were not getting resolved. The situation was impossible."

Minkovski says she was troubled by the more than 30 code violations in the gallery's Acme space, but the last straw was three weeks of daily flooding last month that coincided with the opening of a show, "Women of the African Diaspora." "We were able to contain the water by soaking it up with towels," she says, but the gallery "smelled," and "you'd come in the next day and there's water everywhere." In a hall outside she found "buckets of water" gushing from under a wall, and the unit next door had standing water. "We so much tried to deal with the issues," she says. "But I didn't want to wait for another occasion. We were responsible for other people's work in a situation I didn't feel was safe."

The gallery, which was renting its space, never signed a lease. Warren Leming, a board member of the Near Northwest Arts Council, which developed the Acme facility, says, "We negotiated with them over two years in an attempt to get a lease and then gave up. Without a lease, you're pretty much dead in the water." As for the building itself, Leming says "things are back on track" in spite of a "rump group" of residents who've been holding up repairs by denying contractors access. "I hope things will improve for the other people there," Minkovski says, but as far as Woman Made is concerned, "it's over." Woman Made will open a holiday bazaar in its new home November 25. ■






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Restaurants

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Reader staff and contributors and (where noted) individual Raters. Though reviewers try to reflect the Restaurant Raters' input, reviews should be considered one person's opinion; the collective Raters' opinions are best expressed in the numbers. The complete listings and information on how to become a Reader Restaurant Rater are available at www.chicagoreader.com/restaurantfinder.

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Regional Adventures

Beyond the Burrito, Part 1: Jalisco

First in a series devoted to Chicago restaurants offering regional dishes

West of Mexico City on the Pacific coast, Jalisco is sometimes called the most Mexican state in Mexico. It ranges from coastal Puerto Vallarta to Guadalajara, nestled in the mountains, to Ocotlan, which sits on the shore of Chapala, Mexico's largest lake. Jalisciense specialties vary as widely as the terrain.



BIRRIA

Goats, one of the more benign gifts of the conquistadores, thrive even in the rugged terrain of the Sierra Madre. Traditionally the meat for *birria*, seasoned goat, is smeared with chile paste and cooked over water. Sometimes the goat is wrapped in agave leaves, the source of Jalisco's signature beverage, tequila; the leaves hold in the moisture and impart a subtle tang to the meat.

At **Birrieria Reyes de Ocotlan** (1322 W. 18th, 312-733-2613) in Pilsen, the Reyes family has offered birria and little else for about 25 years, serving it in soup and tacos. For the soup the cooked goat is added to a rich tomato broth seasoned with chiles and cloves and served with chopped onion and fresh cilantro; the dish isn't highly spiced, but on each table are bowls of toasted chile arbol, common in Jalisco. Birria is typically prepared by cooking the meat over, not in, water, but to ensure that their birria stays moist, the Garcia family of **Jalisco Restaurant** (4224 W. 31st, 773-254-4149) in Little Village boils it, a technique that makes it lose some flavor. The goat is served here with sauce, not broth; you spoon hunks onto a tortilla and add onion, cilantro, and parsley. Jalisco Restaurant also offers *barbacoa*, beef prepared in the same manner as birria, with spices including guajillo chiles and cinnamon. If you've shied away from tongue, take the plunge with a flavorful *gordita de lengua*. Even if you freak halfway through, you're out less than two bucks.



POSOLE AND CARNE EN SU JUGO

In Jalisco, as in most of Mexico, animals are used from head to tail. Posole, a soup of white hominy, is



traditionally prepared with a pig's head, neck, or feet as its meat source. At **Restaurant y Pozoleria San Juan** (1523 N. Pulaski, 773-276-5825), one of the few remaining posole places in Chicago, the soup (\$7.50 a bowl) is available in the three colors of the Mexican flag: red, seasoned with guajillo chiles and typical of Jalisco, and the green and white varieties more typical of the neighboring state of Guerrero. (If you want pig foot in your bowl you have to ask for it specifically.) Pedro Aguilar, the owner and sometime cook, serves the hearty dish with baskets of crispy *chicharrones* (fried bits of pigskin).

At **El Taco Veloz** (1745 W. Chicago, 312-738-0363) posole and menudo are served only on Sunday, but *carne en su jugo*, another Jalisco favorite, is available throughout the week. Literally "meat in its juice," this simple dish—chopped beef and bacon in a thin broth filled with beans, avocado, onion, and radishes—is deeply satisfying. The ubiquitous Jalisciense chile arbol is served on the side.

TORTAS AHOGADAS

The *torta*, or Mexican sandwich, was born in the 19th century with the arrival of French invaders, whose expulsion is celebrated on Cinco de Mayo. As with goat from the Spanish, here French white-flour bread was transformed by Mexican cooks into something distinctly their own. Literally "drowned sandwiches," *tortas ahogadas* are made with torpedo-shaped bread rolls called *bolillos* that are filled with pickled onions and meat—frequently *carnitas*, crispy pork chunks—then drenched in piquant red sauce. They're especially

popular in Guadalajara.

A traditional *torta ahogada* is served at **Las Picosas** (6446 S. Pulaski, 773-735-1954), but I found it sour and the bread stale. I preferred a less traditional version served at **Taqueria Traspasada #2** (811 N. Ashland, 312-850-2069): it wasn't drowning in salsa and contained a somewhat unorthodox lettuce leaf and slices of avocado. The best *torta ahogada* I found was



at **Green House Steaks** at the Maxwell Street Market (Green House has a permanent location at 2700 S. Millard, 773-277-6684). The soft, fresh bolillo is cooked in a mild enchilada-type salsa, stuffed with your choice of fillings—I went with chorizo and potatoes—and accompanied by a mound of lettuce, green onions, and *papalo* (a seasonal leaf used on Mexican sandwiches) along with a dollop of sour cream and grated cheese. Less traditional once again, but scrumptious. —David Hammond

Mexican Across the Map

Restaurants serving regional specialties, with entrees under \$15

Arturo's Tacos

2001 N. Western | 773-772-4944

\$ MEXICAN | BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: 24 HOURS EVERY DAY

"Sorry, we don't have anything," we mumbled to the panhandler. But a glance down at the table said we had too much. That's easy to do here: margaritas come in goblets sized for Henry VIII, and once the platters of fajitas and Veracruz-style whole red snapper arrived, we found ourselves piling up hastily cleaned plates. Open round the clock, this inviting, brightly lit corner storefront draws Anglo and Hispanic locals—twentysomethings sipping up a night's drinking with the Tex-Mex standards (tacos, tortas, fat burritos) and workmen huddled over cups of coffee at the counter. I dug the posole: squeeze some lime and add shredded cabbage and white onion to the hominy and tender chunks of pork in a flavorful chile-infused stock, and it's a perfect winter meal in a bowl. The panhandler, though, just wanted a cigarette. **Kate Schmidt**

Carnitas Don Pedro

1113 W. 18th | 312-829-4757

\$ MEXICAN | BREAKFAST, LUNCH: SEVEN DAYS | CASH ONLY | BYO

This place is a meat lover's paradise—a huge pan of pork sits at the counter, as do crisp *chicharrones* (fried pork rinds). While menudo, chorizo, and *nopales* (cactus) are also available, it's the *carnitas* (shredded pork rolled in a double layer of fresh corn tortillas) that are the biggest draw. For about \$5 you'll have enough food to last all day. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

Carnitas Tariacuri

1659 S. Throop | 312-942-0033

\$ MEXICAN | BREAKFAST, LUNCH: SEVEN DAYS | RESERVATIONS NOT ACCEPTED | CASH ONLY | BYO

This small side-street room east of Ashland has a limited menu: carnitas, carnitas, and more carnitas. The homemade flour tortillas rolled around juicy shredded pork and then cooked in lard are the call here; three or four come to less than \$5. The room isn't worth a mention, and most opt to carry out, but the food is a unique treat. This could make a great location for a roll-your-own party (pork in tortillas, that is). **Laura Levy Shatkin**

Carnitas Uruapan

1725 W. 18th | 312-226-2654

\$ MEXICAN | BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | CASH ONLY

There's pig paraphernalia everywhere in this fixture on the 18th Street strip, from pictures and sculptures to coin banks and comic strips. A large pan of fork-tender shredded pork is a main attraction, second only to a high stack of *chicharrones* under

the heat lamp. The few tables are packed every morning, and they do a brisk trade in takeout. The limited selection includes carnitas, menudo, and posole; there are also fresh nopales and *taquitos de sesos*, brain taquitos. The only question you're asked

upon sitting down is "how many," referring to the carnitas, served in plastic baskets. Sneak a peek into the kitchen and you may get a glimpse of a man stirring three huge vats of bubbling pig parts with a big wooden paddle. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

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