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By SHAJIA AHMAD

- Garden City Telegram

The Sequoyah 9 movie theater in Garden City has finally changed hands this week after being in a nearly year-long limbo, and its new owner, Mitchell Theatres, plans not only to lower ticket and concession prices but offer an improved silver-screen experience for movie-goers.

“We’re trying to make it an affordable entertainment venue,” said Brian Mitchell, who along with former owner Dickinson Theatres Inc., first announced their business intentions in March.

Owners Brian and his brother, Brent Mitchell, part of an Elkhart family that farms about 33,000 acres of corn, wheat and grain sorghum in addition to operating movie theaters in Kansas and Oklahoma, had hoped to begin remodeling plans for Garden City’s cinema following the completion of multi-million dollar renovations at Liberal’s Southgate Cinema 6 this past November. However, the theater sale – originally slated to close in April – was delayed several months because Dickinson was unable to release a clear title on the property to its buyers, according to both theater companies.

Both parties have refused to release further details of the purchase agreement.

The theater, located at 1118 Fleming St., closed Tuesday for some minor updates including seat repairs – seats from three auditoriums already have been ripped out, Brian Mitchell said –

and the theater tentatively will re-open at 4:30 p.m. Friday.

The new owners have long-term remodel plans for the theater, now branded Mitchell Theatres Sequoyah Cinema 8, including the installation of stadium seating in all its auditoriums, high-back rocker seats, a new computer system, the addition of an arcade to replace one of the theater's current nine screens, and a completely new and more "glamorous" lobby with six more concession stands for larger crowds in addition to more ticket windows.

In addition to the renovation project – Liberal's remodel took about a year to complete after the Mitchell brothers acquired it in early 2009 – the new owner said he intends to reduce admission prices for all patrons by one dollar, as compared to admission fees under Dickinson.

General admission for screenings will now cost \$6.75, and matinee shows – screenings that begin before 6 p.m. – will cost \$5.50, Mitchell said.

In addition, Mitchell said he also plans to introduce a college student discount in addition to children and senior citizens discounts already in place under Dickinson's operations.

The new theater will boast new popcorn machines, Mitchell said.

"Let's just say we won't be running out of popcorn," Mitchell said.

Mitchell also said almost all of Dickinson's former employees were rehired under the new ownership and that the theater company plans to hire more employees as the venue grows.

Craig Conley, vice president of operations for Dickinson Theatres, could not be reached for comment this morning. Dickinson Theatres has said it plans to focus its growth on larger markets. The company owns and operates 38 movie theater locations in 11 states and is headquartered in Overland Park.

The Mitchells, who have said they aim to expand their regional movie business, also own the Northridge Shopping Center and Northridge Cinema 8 in Guymon, Okla., and The Chisholm Trail Center and Chisholm Trail Cinema 8 in Newton, in addition to Liberal's theater.

Local movie-goers can view show times at the local theater's new Web site:
<http://www.sequoyah8.com/>.

The site, currently under construction, should be updated by the end of the week, Mitchell said. Dickinson group discount tickets will be accepted until May 1, as well, the owner added.

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