

AT LAST: SILVER THEATRE RESTORATION COMMENCES!

By Richard Striner

The long-awaited fulfillment of the Art Deco Society's preservation crusade in Silver Spring, Maryland is now commencing. The restoration of the Silver Theatre/Silver Spring Shopping Center complex – on hold for more than a year – is now beginning in earnest.

Long ago (back in 1984) our campaign began and the owners of the theatre/shopping center complex responded savagely by sledgehammering the Art Deco ornamentation of the Silver Theatre. Through years of advocacy, fighting, strategizing, and negotiating, the Art Deco Society and its civic allies succeeded in making restoration of the complex the legislated policy of Montgomery County, Maryland. With massive financial assistance from the State of Maryland, the Silver Theatre is about to become the new home of the American Film Institute. The adjacent Shopping Center will serve as the gateway to a multi-block, low-rise retail center that is being developed by Foulger-Pratt, in partnership with the County.

Preliminary restoration work on the theatre began several years ago: the roof was fixed and the decorative terraced chimney destroyed by the owners in 1984 was rebuilt brick by brick. The work was then put on hold because of complications in the leasing of the Shopping Center.

But now, everything is back on track. On May 3, Montgomery County gave Foulger-Pratt the order to proceed with restoration of the complex. The complete construction plans have been officially signed and approved.

Completion of the theatre restoration is scheduled for July 2002. The Shopping Center restoration will be completed in late 2002 or in early 2003.

All of this preservation work is doubly protected: not only is the complex listed on Montgomery County's Master Plan for Historic Preservation but a permanent preservation easement will be held by Maryland Historical Trust (a protection required by law when state financial assistance is given to a

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preservation project like this one).

Visit Silver Spring this summer and fall, and watch the vandalized features of the Silver Theatre made new again before your eyes. This was the vision that kept us committed to our task through a long, grim war of attrition. This was the day that we committed ourselves to bring about – however long it took.

