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A touch of Hollywood's glamor

By Bethany Behrhorst, Dispatch/Argus Staff writer

People looking for homes in the Quad-Cities might soon take a trip down Semri Lane or Movie Star Drive.

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Those are just a couple of suggestions for street names at the site of the former Semri Drive In Theater, south of Illini Hospital between Silvis' 17th and 20th avenues.

Developers plan to build 85 homes on 15 of the site's 35 acres, with the other 20 acres used for 190 luxury apartments, said Tom Dalton, a partner with Old Semri Partners LLC development group.

Ground will be broken for the project at 4:30 this afternoon, Mr. Dalton said.

The \$11 million project is "a very significant commitment on the developer's part," said Jim Grafton, Silvis's director of public works and administration. "I think it's probably the hottest development in the Illinois Quad-Cities, with an appeal to families."

Developers will start off with five homes in the \$130,000 price range, according to Mr. Grafton.

The first 15 houses will sit along 17th Avenue, Mr. Dalton said. Model homes will be built to give people an idea what type of homes will be on the site, he said.

They will have names that reflect movie titles, actors and actresses, Mr. Dalton said -- like "The Gable" and "The Astaire."

"We're kind of playing on that movie theme," he said.

The \$150,000 Semri -- the name was an acronym for Silvis, East Moline, Moline and Rock Island -- opened in June 1951. The Semri, its sister drive-in the Memri in Milan, and the Oasis Drive-In in Davenport were all owned by Independent Amusements Inc., "a group of independent theater men of Rock Island, Moline, East Moline and Rock Island," The Rock Island Argus wrote on June 30, 1951.

The theaters were sold 1965 and eventually became part of the National Amusements chain, which build the Showcase Cinemas in Milan around 1970. National Amusements began closing the drive-ins in the mid 1970s.

The Silvis property has been vacant for more than 20 years.

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