

REUTERS
JUNE 18, 2003

Crying Babies Wanted at New York Movie Theater

By Julie MacIntosh

NEW YORK, June 18 (Reuters) - Bawling babies have ruined films for countless moviegoers but now one New York cinema is filling an entire theater with them in an effort to win the business of stir crazy parents who haven't gone out in years.

About 100 urban mothers, and a few stay-at-home dads, checked their designer strollers at the door earlier this week to enjoy a rare baby-friendly flick.

Scores of infants cooed and screeched as the lights dimmed, and one hallway in the Loews Cineplex quickly morphed into a diaper-changing room. But the parents, some of whom had not been to a movie theater in months, gazed intently at the screen, oblivious to the din around them.

"Here, if he makes noise, he's just one of many," stay-at-home dad Michael Zorek said of his son, Jeremy. "As a parent, this is something you never get to do."

"It's even more for us than it is for the babies," said Myong Caiafa, mother of a 6-month-old boy.

Moms and dads aren't the only ones who benefit from the introduction of weekly play dates at the movies. Loews has begun courting New York's stroller set to boost ticket sales on weekdays, when theaters are empty.

"Three months out of the womb, we're already creating a new generation of moviegoers," said John McCauley, vice president of marketing for Loews.

Parents pay full-price for their tickets, but babies are free. The theater, on 34th Street in Manhattan, shows popular first-run movies geared toward parents' tastes.

The "Reel Moms" program will be rolled out into 15 other U.S. markets by this fall, with help from child-rearing Web site urbanbaby.com.