

Ritz Center donors honored

By CLARA CARTRETTE
News Editor

There were lots of happy people in Tabor City last Thursday afternoon as the Ritz Center held its first official event, a private party for the people who donated \$500 or more to help renovate the old movie theatre.

It's no longer a movie theatre, but "ghosts" of western movies that played regularly for decades in The Ritz were present in the dozens of 8x10-inch photos of western movie stars that hung on the old brick walls. The photos were a gift from Jimmy and Joyce Thompkins, his collection over a period of years.

The building that holds many good memories for many people is now a beautiful events center that provides a good-sized venue for all kinds of events, such as weddings, receptions, reunions, concerts, art shows and other events.

A home-grown Columbus County man who has become a successful full-time entertainer will have the inaugural performance in the Ritz Center next month. Greg Thompson, who grew up in Chadbourne and established the popular Strawberry Cloggers when he was only 14 years old, is bringing The Sweeney Family Band country comedy show to town for a 7:30 p.m. performance on Saturday, July 26. A show the entire family will enjoy, it can

be compared to a combination of Grand Ole Opry and Hee Haw.

Also already booked are four wedding receptions and a high school reunion.

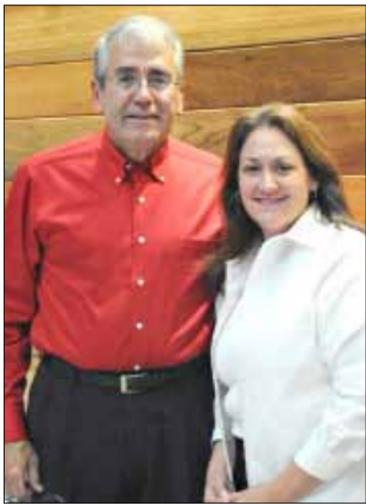
A buffet dinner, catered by the Todd House, was enjoyed by a packed house of generous donors. All table decorations were donated by Vicky Ward. No doubt worn out from working so hard to assure that it was a welcoming, beautiful and special event, Steve Lynch and Dianne Ward were probably the most excited to know that Phase II has been completed and the final Phase III will entail having the Ritz Center marquee erected soon.

Tables were beautifully decorated, carrying out a movie theme with tickets wound around lanterns, accenting the many western movie star photos.

Lynch, Tabor City's first promotions director, and Ward, the current promotions director, worked together on

the Ritz Center project. Ward gave a brief history of the Ritz, built in 1929 and closed in 1979. C.M. Fowler bought it, sold it to Tommy and Edna Small who sold it to the Tabor City Chamber of Commerce, who sold it back to the Smalls. Tommy Small, who spoke later, said he learned that it would cost \$375,000 to restore it, and donated it to the town. A stipulation in the deed was to retain the original appearance of the theatre as much as possible.

Both spoke about the important role donors have played in the success of the project and



Steve Lynch and Dianne Nobles Ward

how it came together. Lynch, who had retired but came back to help see the project through, said the town is lucky to have Ward as she does a tremendous job and her ideas are just super. He added that Ward, Rod Sanders and Stan Fowler were the artsy side, and he was the money man. He also gave credit to his friend Bill Proffitt who made a lobby sign and a replica of the Ritz front that is displayed under lights

in a back hallway. Lynch introduced Sonny Graham, who was general contractor for the project.

Town Manager Al Leonard gave the invocation and dedicated the building. Instead of the typical ribbon cutting, Leonard donned a cowboy hat, pulled out two cap pistols and fired away, declaring Ritz Center dedicated.

Also speaking was Rusty Carter of Atlantic Publish-

ing, who donated \$50,000 in memory of his parents, Horace and Lucille Carter. He reminisced about how he played up and down the streets of Tabor City growing up, how he and Russell Wright used to shoot marbles in a hole behind the stores, movies he had seen at the Ritz and he takes cholesterol medicine now from eating so many hot dogs and hamburgers from C.M. and Dock Fowler's restaurants. He

addressed Miona Fonvielle as his all-time favorite teacher, stating that he learned more from her about how to run Atlantic Publishing than from any high school or college teacher he had.

"Lucille and Horace would be thrilled about this," he said of the Ritz Center. "What they would be proudest of is only one entrance."

More about the Ritz Center later.