

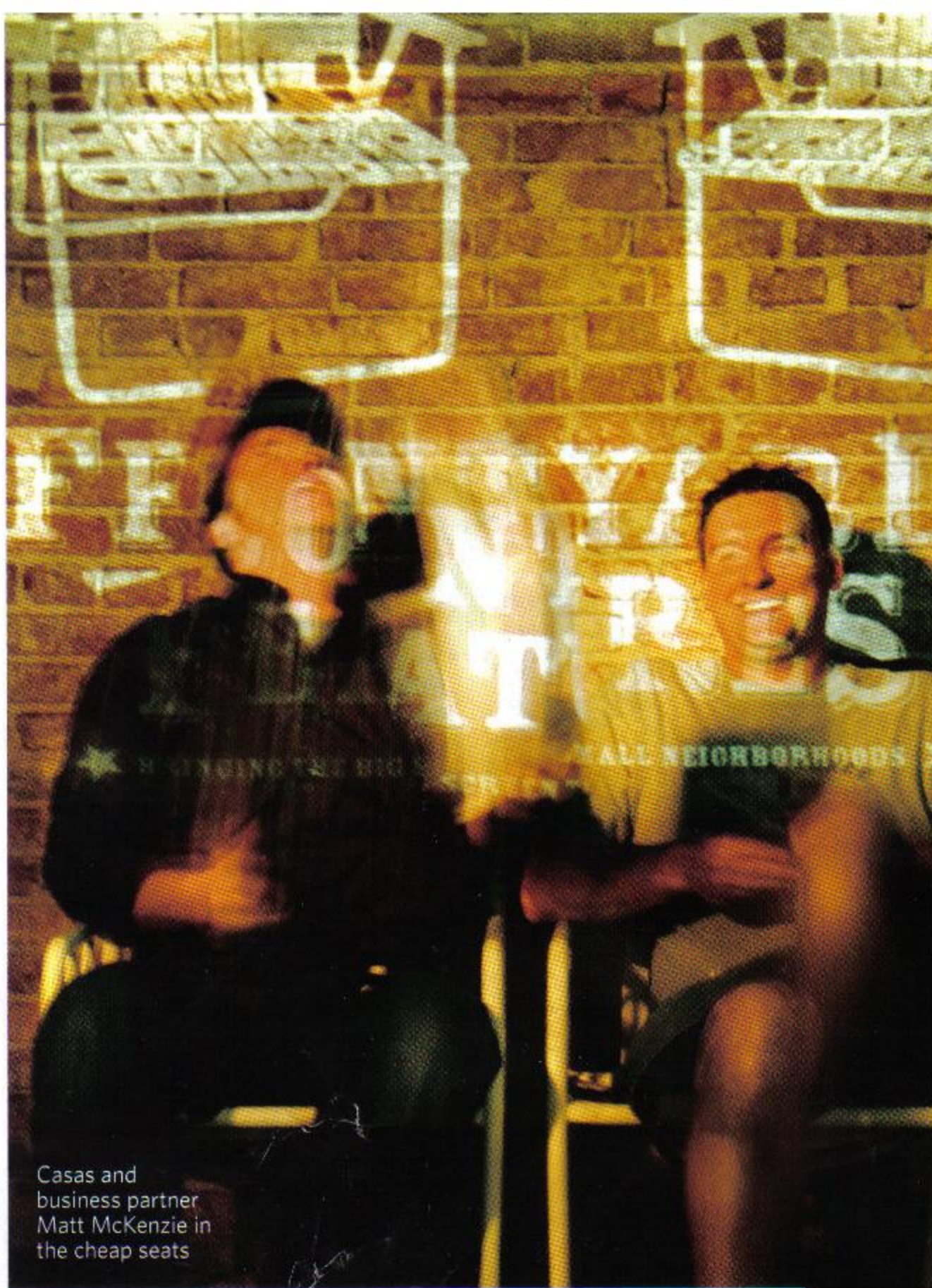
plenty of pioneers have come to St. Louis with grandiose visions of opening a club or starting a restaurant, only to be squashed by the city's apparent preference for local entrepreneurs. But then there are those few transplants who dive right in and experience a little success—like Martin Casas, whose interest in St. Louis' neighborhoods inspired him to create his own grass-roots business, Front Yard Features.

Casas dreamed up the endeavor—showing films outdoors once a week in different neighborhoods—while walking in Tower Grove Park two years ago, just after arriving in St. Louis. He thought that screening movies for a large audience in a public place would be an easy way to meet neighbors, so he developed a strategy ... sort of: "My initial plan was to rent some movies from Blockbuster and blast the image onto a sheet thrown over a baseball-diamond fence."

In early 2006, Casas attended countless neighborhood meetings to present his plan, and at each meeting he found someone willing to donate time or tools for the project: A graphic artist offered to design the posters. Hanneke Hardware donated two buckets filled with 90 pounds of cement and a large metal frame. And in exchange for a preshow ad, a seamstress sewed a fortified bedsheet to make a screen.

Community support was there, but highly immobile equipment, minimal funds and strict FCC regulations kept the project small last summer; Casas only screened nine movies. This year, determined to "establish a tradition," he wanted to provide the same hometown entertainment on a much larger scale. "As of December I was still wondering if it should be as big as I wanted it to be," he explains, "and then I was like, 'The hell with it—why not?'" He'll screen 40 movies in 10 neighborhoods this summer.

Front Yard's fund-

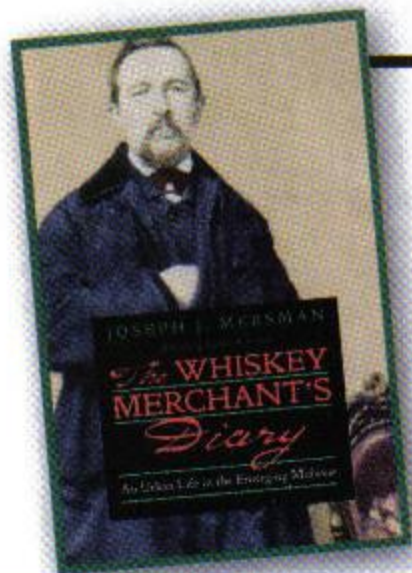


Casas and business partner Matt McKenzie in the cheap seats

have screen, will travel

How a St. Louis transplant embarked on the unlikeliest of film series

ing and support increased with help from neighborhood associations Casas approached in preparation for this summer. He sold advertising space on the screen to local businesses and was able to purchase an 18-by 20-foot inflatable screen with a clearer projector and quality audio hookups.



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