

# Fans pack 'Dark Knight'

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THE SAGINAW NEWS

JUL 18 2008  
Josh Westfall could have watched an advance screening of "The Dark Knight" in his hometown of Austin, Texas, a week and a half before worldwide audiences.

But since work held him up, the 29-year-old Clio native who's vacationing in mid-Michigan settled for this morning's premiere at Cinema Hollywood, 12280 Dixie Highway in Birch Run.

Westfall, a Batman fan since watching the television show and reading the comics as a kid, still wouldn't have had it any other way.

"There's a special lingering quality about coming to a midnight showing," he said. "You are one of the first ones to see the show. It really draws people partial to the film." JUL 18 2008

More than 1,000 people packed two Saginaw County theaters at 12:01 a.m. this morning to catch the first public glimpse of the sequel to "Batman Begins," starring Christian Bale as the Caped Crusader and the late Heath Ledger as The Joker.

The film debuts nationally in 4,366 theaters this weekend, the all-time widest opening release for any film, reports *BoxOfficeMojo.com*.

Two theater managers anticipate that the film will

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easily top other premieres in the last year.

Gregory J. Leo, manager of Saginaw 8, 3250 Kabobel, said about 750 ticketbuyers had reserved seats to fill two theaters as of 8:30 p.m. Thursday and spill over into a third. Saginaw 8 showed the film on four screens.

"It's definitely the biggest movie of the summer," he said.

Meanwhile, Cinema Hollywood sold 535 tickets as of Thursday evening and three theaters running the 12:01 a.m. premiere, said manager Nicole VanSlambrouck.

"The Dark Knight," one of this year's most anticipated blockbusters, drew even more buzz because of Ledger's death in January. The 28-year-old Oscar nominee died from an accidental prescription drug overdose

shortly after filming the movie.

VanSlambrouck expects to see Batman fans and Ledger fans alike throughout the weekend.

"Even if people aren't big Batman fans, they'll go to see it because of Heath," she said.

"I don't care too much for Batman movies — I'm OK with them — but I'm going to see this one because it's (Ledger's) last big movie."

Robert J. Calangelo, 19, was looking forward to "The Dark Knight" since he saw "Batman Begins" in 2005. He watched that movie three times in theaters.

"If I like a movie enough, I'll go see it three times," said the James Township resident. "I'll probably go see this movie three times, too." ♦