

Holocaust-Era Movie to Film At Zaharakos Ice Cream Parlor

For all of the 20th century, Hoosiers enjoyed sweet treats at the famous Zaharakos Ice Cream Parlor in Columbus, Indiana. Now that ornate Victorian emporium is slated to be a movie set—for a wholly different story. Thanks to Netherlands-based film producer Robert Moniot and Columbus industrialist and philanthropist Tony Moravec, Zaharakos is set to stand in for an opulent Jewish-owned ice cream parlor in Amsterdam, the site of a seminal act of resistance to the Nazis in World War II. *The Ice Cream Man* is the name of the film.

In the 1930s, Amsterdam's popular



Zaharakos Ice Cream Parlor in Columbus, Indiana, will become a movie set when Netherlands-based producer Robert Moniot films part of *The Ice Cream Man* there beginning in March. Courtesy photo



(l-r) The late Tony Moravec, owner of Zaharakos; Elliot Lewis, Bloomington businessman and owner of Cedarview Management; and producer of the film *The Ice Cream Man*, Rob Moniot. Photo by Douglas A. Wissing

Café Koco was owned by Ernst Cahn, who had moved his German Jewish family to Amsterdam to escape Nazi persecution only to encounter the May 1940 Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. On February 19, 1941, the Nazi Ordnungspolizei raided Café Koco for being a center of resistance to anti-Jewish laws. A group inside confronted the German police, spraying them with ammonia. Led by SS officer Franz Barbie (later infamous as the Butcher of Lyon), the Nazis retaliated by rounding up 425 Jews in the Waterlooplein Jewish quarter and deporting them to the Buchenwald concentration camp. Reaction to the roundup ignited Europe's largest mass protest against Nazi oppression. Organized by the radical left and trade unions, the Amsterdam General Strike of February

25-27, 1941, shut down the city. After torturing Cahn, the Nazis executed him by firing squad in the Wassenaar Dunes near the Hague on March 3, 1941.

This 21st-century collaboration between the Netherlands and America is ultimately a confluence of immigrant stories: Just as the Cahn family emigrated to escape Nazi terror, the Zaharakos family were early 20th-century Greek refugees who fled the Balkan wars during the Ottoman Empire's chaotic collapse. While most Greeks who came to America migrated to large cities, many settled in small Midwestern towns like Columbus, where the Zaharakos became beloved confectioners and soda-fountain kings.

By 2006, however, the Zaharakos Soda Fountain was in disrepair and closed. But Columbus' grand emporium

got a reprieve. The late pharmaceutical industrialist Tony Moravec decided to revive it. The century-old business got an award-winning restoration and was recast as a soda fountain museum with an array of antique artifacts. When the ice cream parlor reopened in June 2009 Hoosiers could once again enjoy Zaharakos' old-fashioned sodas and sloppy joes while learning about America's enduring affection for ice cream parlors.

Ice Cream Man writer, director, and producer Robert Moniot (pronounced Mon-Yō) describes himself as "an entertainment kid," who grew up in movie-crazed Los Angeles, where he worked in films from his boyhood. Now living in the Netherlands with his U.S. diplomat wife, Moniot became obsessed with the story of Cahn and his resistance to the Nazis. Hammering out a screenplay, Moniot entered it into the German Claims Commission's contest to help finance short films about the Holocaust. In 2022 Moniot's *Ice Cream Man* was selected as the winner of the \$50,000 top prize. Moniot searched to find an old-fashioned ice cream parlor similar to Café Koco. When he encountered photos of the restored Zaharakos, he realized he'd found his movie set. Zaharakos was "eerily similar" to Café Koco, Moniot says. When the filmmaker contacted Zaharakos, he found enthusiastic supporters in Moravec and his friend, Bloomington businessman Elliot Lewis.

And that's how a movie about a Jewish-owned ice cream parlor in Amsterdam will end up being filmed in an ice cream parlor in Columbus.

"I feel good about it," Moravec told *Bloom* shortly before he died, "It's got good momentum." Lewis introduced Moniot at fundraising events, including an Indianapolis Holocaust Remembrance dinner, where the movie gained further support.

Moravec unexpectedly died of natural causes at age 72 on November 9, 2022.

There was scarcely a pause before the Moravec family decided that the show must go on. A crew of 40 to 60 filmmakers and actors are scheduled to begin shooting *The Ice Cream Man* in March. The restored Zaharakos will be reborn as Café Koco, the Indiana Dunes will stand in for the Wassenaar Dunes, and the Bartholomew County courthouse might figure in a scene or two. It is what Tony Moravec would have wanted, says Lewis.

—Douglas A. Wissing

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