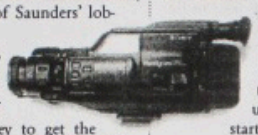
"I saw it as a wonderful opportunity for the hospital to give something back to the patients, and Bruce, being a former patient, recognizes these needs," Colwill says.

"Bruce can be demanding," he adds. "He know what he wants and he keeps after it. He's tenacious."

When Saunders decided the seats in the theatre were getting worn, he started a campaign to have them replaced. Ron Thomson, as manager of audio-visuals, was the main target of Saunders' lobbying.



"I kept saying, 'We're in the health care business here. We don't have a lot of time, energy or money to get the other stuff,'" Thomson recalls. "And he kept bugging me relentlessly for a year and a half."

How relentlessly?

"Once a week. In a nice way, but once a week."

Saunders got his way.

Now Thomson says the health care community should do more to help Saunders. "I'd like to see him get a little more support from the Victoria mental health community. Just for the recognition. I don't see many mental health professionals going to his movies or volunteering to come and speak."

By his own admission, Saunders is never slow to protest any hospital policy he thinks is stupid. During the first year of Movie Monday, Saunders was told he wasn't allowed to take pictures of audience members, because it could jeopardize patient confidentiality.

The stricture gave him an idea. He pictured an image: a panorama of rows and rows of people in movie seats, all with black cards blocking out their eyes. "This is the kind of thing we manic depressives dream up in our spare time," he giggles.

He arrived the next Monday for a double bill of *Imagine* and *A Hard Day's Night* with 100 black cards and a camera ready to record the protest.

"Only 20 people showed up. It broke my heart," he sighs. The confidentiality rule remains in place.

Despite his legendary persistence, Saunders talks about the success of his movie series as a sort of fluke.

"I'm still amazed that it actually happened," he says.

He's also quick to point out his advantages. His wife and two sons have supported him from the beginning. His parents help him out financially, paying for both boys to attend St. Michaels University School. And he managed to find a project that operates largely outside the bureaucracy of the hospital.

He also argues that there are plenty of other people with mental illnesses who would like to help improve the health system but end up being stymied. "They'll start an initiative, put in a lot of energy, and there's just not much response. It's not a really responsive system."

In early 1996, Saunders gave the capital mental health advisory committee a frank talk on tokenism. His notes from that talk reflect a gracious frustration: "A few who have had experience with mental illness that are well enough, informed enough and well organized enough to make it to meetings, must be ready to selflessly represent a constituency, be altruistically motivated and independently wealthy enough to give away copious amounts of time and energy dealing conscientiously with the process. They must be grateful enough just to be there and disregard the fact that most of the others sitting around the table are making their living."

Saunders' greatest victory isn't a public one, however, but a private push to carry on, week after week, even when his mood makes the simplest tasks monumental.

Rain patters on the sun roof and Saunders slouches back in a solarium chair. He talks slowly and softly, his sentences easily tapering off into silences.

"I'm feeling a little shaky right now," he confesses. He smiles, but something beyond it is too painful to be a joke.

The opposite is what Laurel calls his "zippy" moods. During one interview in Saunders' kitchen, his fried egg on toast went cold on his plate as he leaned over it, waving his hands through another monologue on the difficulties of a hospital movie impresario.

Saunders' medication, Tegretol, evens out but doesn't eliminate his mood swings. "The drugs don't solve problems you run into in life," he says plainly.

Even when well, people with mental illnesses face challenges that would make anyone unhappy. It can be difficult for them to hold down a job. Relationships suffer. And, of course, they have to deal with those people that see them as dangerous and unreliable.

When Saunders was considering whether to "come out" as a manic-depressive, he was advised against it.

"My psychiatrist said it wasn't a good idea to be public. What if you want to get a real job?"

Saunders says a quarter of people with manic depression end up taking their own lives. His own sister, also manic depressive, killed herself with an overdose of pills.

How much of this misery is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain, and how much by events in life? It's a question that Saunders doesn't feel he can answer. "It's like your liver's trying to assess whether your liver's out of sync."

If both are factors, the medical system is only really equipped to deal with one: the chemical imbalance. Taxpayers are willing to provide drugs and hospital care. Housing, jobs and community are a little trickier, and "psychosocial rehabilitation" programs–the label put on programs like Movie Monday–are often undervalued.

"Movie Monday is a really valuable thing for a lot of people, giving them something to look forward to, some access, some socialization. But it's hard to prove that that's as valuable as time in the hospital."

Saunders estimates that 10% of Movie Monday's audiences are current psychiatric patients. Others are former psychiatric patients. The rest could be anyone.

NOW and then, someone laughs at an apparently inappropriate time, but isn't there always someone like that?

It's a good night tonight. The theatre is filled to capacity for *Fly Away Home*, and even in the lobby people are crowding to watch Anna Paquin come to terms with her mother's death while tending a gaggle of orphaned goslings.

Saunders perches on a stool in the projection room, anxiously watching the sound levels. One side of the stereo system seems to be stronger than the other, and he can't figure out why. And it'll get noticed; one of the regulars is a music therapist who maintains that the sound is always too loud. Sure enough, she stops by the projection room twice.

"This is the best way though, when people feel they're lucky to be here."

In some ways the movie is humdrum, falling into children's film clichés, with cartoon villains and a porous plot-line. What Saunders is making in this theatre isn't just a piece of entertainment, though.

In one of his several essays on the Movie Monday web site, Saunders describes how the "powerful experience of watching a movie becomes a way to communicate."

Once people have watched a movie together and been moved by its contents, they have something in common, he says. "Now those experiences have become a common benchmark through which we can explain ourselves to each other. We can talk about those issues and emotions, knowing we've all been through the identical scenario together."

Fly Away Home seems to have made the point. There are quite a few tear-streaked faces in the crowd emerging from the theatre. Most of the hands wiping away those tears aren't marked by yellow bracelets.

Bruce is grinning as he says his goodbyes, the video minister bidding farewell to his flock.

Another week done.