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THE POWER OF THE FORCE

Phantom Menace opening becomes pseudo national holiday

NEW YORK (AP) — Seth Miller has been preparing his clients for a month: come May 19, he and his staff hope to be in a galaxy far, far away, enjoying the return of *Star Wars*.

Do not look for many *Star Wars* buffs at work on The Big Day, the Wednesday release of the latest installment in the galactic epic.

They are closing down offices, renting out theaters and taking weeks of vacation to stand in line for tickets.

By one estimate, more than 2 million workers could skip work for the movie's opening. A national holiday is taking shape.

"Nothing's that important that we can't skip work for the day," says Miller, president of Boston-based Miller Systems, an Internet consulting company with a staff of seven. "As soon as the date was announced for the movie, I decided that had to be a company holiday."

For Brandon Herman, practically all of May is a holiday.

He told his parents that he will not be working at his family's video production company most of the month because of the movie, the first release of a *Star Wars* film since 1983. Tickets go on sale May 12.

"I've waited 16 years," he said, standing his ground in the ticket line outside a New York theater as fellow fans around him duelled with lightsabers. "I can't wait any longer."

Baby boomers grew up with the Jedi and are now calling the shots in many offices. The *Star Wars* lexicon is already part of the workplace culture in many places, particularly in high-tech fields. "May the Force be with you!" co-workers say. "Try not. Do ... or do not. There is no try."

Ric Edelman, head of Edelman Financial Services in Fairfax, Va., is having the three earlier *Star Wars* films shown at his firm — twice — having discovered that 7 percent of his 90 employees had not seen any of them.

He also hopes to take his entire staff to see the new movie.

"Those of us who've seen them find it hard to believe there's anybody in America who hasn't," Edelman said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LUCASFILM LTD.
Jake Lloyd stars as the young Anakin Skywalker in *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*. Anakin grows up to be the menacing Darth Vader, one of the most memorable villains in film history.

Sheree Franklin, a human resources director at GoldMine Software of Pacific Palisades, Calif., watches the trilogy at least twice a month.

During opening week, she and her co-workers will see the movie when their boss rents a theater.

When Wil Schroter heard the movie was coming, he quickly rented a 500-seat theater in Columbus, Ohio, for employees at his Internet consulting firm, NGDA Interactive Communications, and their guests.

But their enthusiasm surprised even Schroter, a diehard fan.

He got requests for 100 tickets in 10 minutes — the biggest response he has ever gotten to a company e-mail. To complete the May 21 festivities, he is throwing a pre-screening office

party and encouraging the staff to work late that day.

Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc., an employment agency, estimates 2.2 million employees could skip work to see the movie opening day.

Will that hurt productivity? Economist Sung Won Sohn of Wells Fargo Minneapolis says any dip will be offset by a boost in spending on things such as tickets or popcorn.

Still, you will not catch him taking the off or standing in line to see the movie. *Star Wars* fan but says he will wait a while.

"My time is more valuable," he said with a chuckle.

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