

HEAD: Historical Williams Candy debuts on silver screen

DECK: Nearly 90-year-old candy store stars in Oscar-winning film 'Anora'

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**CONEY ISLAND** — Williams Candy Store has long been a staple of the Coney Island boardwalk, but the neon sign and colorful candy in the window made its feature film debut in the five-time Oscar winning film “Anora.”

As beloved as well-known Coney Island landmarks such as the Cyclone and Nathan’s Famous Hot Dogs, Williams gained the interest of Sean Baker, the director of Anora.”

“Anora” tells the story of a sex worker from Brooklyn and her unlikely, impulsive marriage to the son of a Russian Oligarch. The film pays homage to several Brooklyn sites: Brighton Beach, Sheepshead Bay, Mill Basin and Coney Island.

The makers of “Anora” walked into Williams Candy in the winter of 2022 and asked Williams Candy Owner Peter Agrapides Jr. if they could film some scenes for their independent film in his store.

“It was just these regular people. It wasn’t a big movie, just a small group of people scouting around,” Agrapides said.

Much to Agrapides surprise, the film gained traction. The low-budget, independent romantic comedy caused a stir when it was named a [Top 10 film of 2024](#) by the National Board of Review and the American Film Institute and again when it was nominated for five Golden Globes. The “Anora” team left the Golden Globes empty handed, but the disappointment was short lived.

The film was nominated for six Oscars at the 97th Academy Awards and won five, including Best Picture and Best Actress for lead Mikey Madison.

A hallmark of the film is its rough-around-the-edges but endearing portrayal of Brooklyn sites, including Williams Candy.

Founded by the Williams family in 1941, the store was born into an era of [Coney Island commercialization](#). The stress of the Great Depression put pressure on the community, and as the 40s continued to unfold, visitors came to Coney Island to escape the reality of World War II as it became a site of entertainment. The boardwalk and Surf Avenue expanded to include more shops, arcades and restaurants—including Williams Candy.

While the Williams family ran the candy store, Agrapides' father, Peter Agrapides Sr., worked a summer job selling food underneath the Coney Island train station. Agrapides Sr. was drafted and sent to Korea in the early '50s. When he returned, he bought [Eddie's Fascination](#), an arcade game across the street from Williams.

Agrapides' Sr. moved to Pete's Clam Stop in 1976 and took over Williams when the original owner passed away in 1982. Agrapides Jr. worked with his father at Pete's Clam Stop and eventually took over both businesses. Agrapides Jr. recalled days of learning from his father's work with both businesses with a knowing smile saying, "He's crazy."

"[He was] mostly old school," Agrapides Jr. said. "I made everything newer, more modern."

In the 84 years that the bright yellow sign has decorated the face of Williams, it's witnessed history like the opening of [Astroland USA](#) in 1962 and the inaugural [Mermaid Parade](#) in 1983. The historical facade has also witnessed great challenges. The drug and crime [surge](#) of the 80s further challenged the community of Coney Island. In October of 2012, Williams was forced to close to renovate after the destruction of [Hurricane Sandy](#). Williams also confronted the threat of COVID-19 in 2020 head on.

“COVID was — I hate to say it — a blessing in disguise because it made everybody knock all the old stuff and make everything new,” Agrapides Jr. said.

Despite the ups and downs of the last 84 years, Williams has stood tall, and the candy apples in the window never seemed to lose their appeal for Coney Island locals and tourists alike. According to Agrapides Jr., the store has persisted for so long because there’s nothing else like it. While there are other candy stores in Coney Island, none of them embody the Coney Island charm and quirk like Williams.

“It’s an old-school candy store,” Agrapides Jr. said. “We make our own candy. Everything you see in the window, we make.”

The store’s charm wasn’t lost on Baker. “Anora” features Williams Candy in a few scenes, one of which involves the store being smashed to bits, which Agrapides Jr. said was a shock to him.

“They didn’t tell me that, to be honest,” Agrapides Jr. said. “That was hard to watch. They changed my glass to their glass [and] they cleaned up everything nicely [but] just to see that ... It’s crazy.”

The film also features longtime Coney Island resident and Williams employee Billy O’Brien, 75, as the store’s owner, another quirk in the unconventional film. According to Agrapides Jr., Baker picked O’Brien out from behind the counter and asked him to be in the film, and O’Brien agreed.

“He’s a carnival person,” Agrapides Jr. said. “He used to put me on rides when I was a kid. [I’ve] known him since I was five.”

Williams and O’Brien have both received calls to be in upcoming films. Agrapides Jr. said he is open to seeing Williams on the big screen again, but O’Brien’s acting days seem to have come to an end.

According to Agrapides Jr., Williams has already received visitors hoping to catch a glimpse of the store featured in the film, and he expects to receive even more as summer approaches. Agrapides Jr. didn't anticipate the film's level of success, but he's riding the wave of recognition along with the rest of the "Anora" team from his candy shop nestled between the Coney Island boardwalk and Surf Avenue.