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6 SECTIONS, 42 PAGES

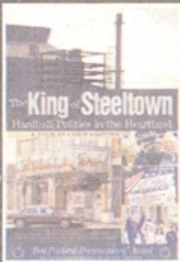
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PASTRICK TRIBUTE FILM MAY HOLD A CLUE TO EAST CHICAGO SIDEWALK SCANDAL

THE KING OF STEELTOWN

THE SEQUEL COULD UNFOLD IN FEDERAL COURT



In 1999, Chris Sautter directed "The King of Steeltown," a documentary about Mayor Robert Pastrick's 1999 re-election campaign. A source close to the East Chicago sidewalk scandal investigation confirmed the film may contain evidence admissible at the trial.

"The King of Steeltown" still photos are courtesy of Sautter Films

BY BILL DOLAN
Times Staff Writer

EAST CHICAGO — Mayor Robert Pastrick was all smiles as the credits rolled in "King of Steeltown," a documentary film meant as a tribute to his 1999 re-election campaign.

Federal investigators now are hard at work producing its sequel, a courtroom drama in which Pastrick's administration and legacy lie shipwrecked on \$20 million in concrete sidewalks and other public improvements hurriedly approved and carried out in an alleged scheme to buy votes in that election four years ago.

"Steeltown," a cinema verite directed by expatriate Hoosier Chris Sautter, won best documentary at the New York International Independent Film Festival in 2001, but was never boffo at the box office.

However, it apparently achieved cult status with one local group.

"A while back, I received a call from one of the lawyers in the U.S. attorney's office about the sidewalk case," Sautter said.

See STEELTOWN, A5



JON L. HENDRICKS / THE TIMES

East Chicago Councilman Frank Kollintzas, right, walks Wednesday to the South Bend Federal Courthouse with his lawyers.



A welcome to East Chicago sign is displayed in "The King of Steeltown" film by expatriate Hoosier Chris Sautter.



JON L. HENDRICKS / THE TIMES

Parks foreman Joe Valdez walks Wednesday from the South Bend Federal Courthouse surrounded by family members.

Steeltown

Continued from A1

"The gentleman I spoke to said they had all seen the film. When I told him I was the only one authorized to sell copies and I had no record of selling to anyone in his office, he quickly ordered a copy."

The U.S. attorney's office has spearheaded a lengthy investigation that resulted earlier this month in federal fraud and conspiracy charges against six East Chicago officials.

Chris Balzer, a spokeswoman for the U.S. attorney's office, which will prosecute the six, said this week she hasn't seen the film.

However, a source close to the investigation confirmed investigators have seen the film and suggested it may contain admissible evidence at the trial, which could begin early next year.

Now available in DVD or VHS tape on the Sautter Films Web page, the 75-minute film can be examined frame by frame for any incriminating or exculpatory moments.

Cut to the scenes of precinct committeemen collecting money in envelopes or Noah Atterson Spann, convicted bribe-taker and co-chairman of Pastrick's campaign, brow-beating Pastrick supporters to get out the vote.

Or is evidence at the very feet of the players?

City Councilmen Frank Kollintzas, Joe De La Cruz and Adrian Santos; City Controller Edwardo Maldonado; City Engineer Pedro Porras; and parks foreman Joe Valdez have pleaded not guilty to charges they jackhammered to pieces a number of state laws to pave new sidewalks, driveways, and patios on public and private land in their rush to impress voters in the months before the 1999 Democratic primary.

The indictment alleges Kollintzas told an unidentified East Chicago business owner in April 1999 the city would

pay for paving its parking lot. Eventually, a city contractor poured \$100,000 worth of new concrete there, and Maldonado paid for it out of the city's public treasury.

The indictment alleges the business owner returned the favor by hosting a large party for various East Chicago elected officials.

In one scene of the film, Kollintzas and Pastrick are at an outdoor campaign rally in a parking lot that appears to be newly paved with concrete.

"When the deputy U.S. attorney called wanting out-takes or any shots prior to the rally ... I told him two things," Sautter said. "First there were no out-takes to speak of. I held nothing back in making this film.

"This thing was shot 'run and gun' style, so we had no second chance at shooting a given scene. Secondly, I told him that day was the only day I shot at that parking lot. It may have been repaved. But who can tell? I think you have to read a lot into that scene to reach that conclusion from the film.

"In my opinion, the only persuasive evidence that it had been paved would be testimony from the people doing the paving in East Chicago in 1999. They could tell you and their records could tell you what was paved and what wasn't.

"You really have to guess about that from watching the film, and I don't think you can count on getting a conviction in federal court on the basis of conjecture. It just looked like your standard grocery store parking lot to me."

Sautter worked as a political consultant for Pastrick and got unprecedented access into the workings of the campaign. He said in a 2001 interview that he got the idea for the documentary after talking with Kevin Pastrick about how his father's place in East Chicago political history should be preserved.

It foreshadowed not only

the coming sidewalk scandal, but also the absentee ballot fraud controversy that Councilman George Pabey used to nearly upset Robert Pastrick in last spring's primary.

It has sparked another grand jury investigation by Lake County Prosecutor Bernard Carter, which could target more than a hundred others in the Pastrick campaign machine.

The protagonist of "Steeltown" is the unindicted Mayor Pastrick, who speaks fondly of his three decades in office, punches the air as he rallies supporters and beams before large groups of people herded into parking lots and recreation halls to shout "Four More Years!"

However, director Sautter's film also shows the Pastrick camp in crisis.

Challenger Stephen R. "Bob" Stiglich is running again for the second time in four years. He looks like easy pickings, but Stiglich has a surprise for the incumbent: He's got 2,000 absentee votes for himself in his back pocket before the polls even open.

Their fear becomes palpable on election day eve with rumors of voting-machine tampering. The mayor's son, Kevin, on election night, says, "I'm nervous. ... It's very frightening. I feel like they are trying to steal the election."

(Kevin Pastrick was indicted earlier this month in an unrelated case alleging he was involved in an illegal union pension-investment scheme.)

Pastrick had maintained himself in office since 1972 through public largesse, creating public jobs and free or low-cost city services, so his administration had no qualms, feds allege, when it pumped a modest public-improvement project full of steroids in the months leading to the election.

A number of scenes are of contractors breaking up what appear to be old sidewalks and pouring concrete into forms. The camera races down

row upon row of new concrete sidewalks and driveways.

In another scene, Kevin Pastrick jokes, "Yesterday, Stiglich was walking up and down the streets. (Someone) yelled out, 'How do you like the new sidewalks?'"

The backroom meetings reveal much of City Hall was put on war footing for the campaign.

Frank Alcalá, Pastrick's police chief, arranges a police presence at polling places where Stiglich's supporters are most defiant.

Jim Fife, a longtime Pastrick confidant, shuffles through a stack of envelopes (he explains off camera each one contains \$1,000 to hire election workers and "to do whatever needs to be done") and hands one to Tony, a precinct committeeman.

Fife: "Tony, I don't have to tell you what to do. We need everything you've got 'til Tuesday (election day)."

Pastrick's supporters on the County Election Board threw out Stiglich's absentee ballots. Justin Murphy, an attorney and Pastrick supporter, said absentee votes were being bought by Stiglich's people, an allegation that never resulted in criminal charges.

The same allegations were made this year by a recount judge against Pastrick's campaign, leading to the current investigation by the prosecutor.

In 1999, absentee ballots didn't play a significant role. Pastrick's campaign got enough people to the polls to swamp Stiglich, who ruefully blames the sidewalk project for his downfall.

James Wieser, a lawyer and longtime political observer, laments, "I'm convinced the way they conduct elections in East Chicago, the way they vote, is a way of life and they don't see anything wrong with it. They think that is the way of the world. It's been that way forever."

There is no word on how the current sequel may end.