

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

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John Strauss

East Chicago race 'stars' in documentary

There aren't many politicians left like East Chicago Mayor Robert Pastrick. They know this already in East Chicago, where the State Board of Accounts last month spanked Pastrick's administration for a 1999 election-year sidewalk-replacement plan.

The city paid not only for sidewalks, it turned out, but for patios, porches and other concrete work for private citizens as Pastrick headed for a grudge-match primary fight with fellow Democrat Stephen Stiglich. A lawyer for the city has said the money came from casino revenues and shouldn't have been considered "public" funds.

There were other colorful elements in the primary, including alleged payoffs to some absentee voters and suspected voter machine tampering that led to the arrest of two people the night before the election.

So it's no surprise that Indiana University graduate and political consultant Chris Sautter picked the race as the subject for his documentary, *The King of Steeltown: Hardball Politics in the Heartland*.

The behind-the-scenes film, along the lines of *The War Room* about President Clinton, won "Best Political Documentary" recently at the New York International Independent Film and Video Festival.

It was shown for the first time in the state Tuesday night at the Indiana Historical Society theater.

Sautter admires Pastrick as an old-style, precinct-level politician, and he worked for the eight-term mayor in Pastrick's 1995 and 1999 campaigns. Still, the film, which Sautter hopes to sell to a cable network for national distribution, isn't exactly an idealized portrait.

In one scene, Pastrick whips up a rally of city employees, turning them against a reporter from *The Times of Northwest Indiana* who is covering the event.

"It was both electrifying and in some ways a little frightening," Sautter recalls.

"The film captures the good and the bad. And there is quite a bit of good there, if you appreciate strong leadership. In these times, people are appreciating that kind of leadership more and more.

"He definitely gets things done."