

SIDEWALKS-FOR-VOTES INDICTMENTS

"I told them no. I knew what they were doing. I knew it was wrong. They knew it was wrong, too."

East Chicago resident Sam Perez, on sidewalk and driveway work done in his neighborhood in 1999

Concrete evidence



PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE DOWELL/POST-TRIBUNE
Sam Perez's driveway, a noticeably darker tone, is the same one that has been there since he moved to his East Chicago home about 20 years ago. His neighbors, all 13 other houses in this block of Stewart Court, have newer concrete driveways from 1999.

Putting up a Pastrick sign during the 1999 East Chicago election might have earned you a new sidewalk, or perhaps a tree removal, all at taxpayer expense.

FOURTEEN driveways divide the lawns around a small cul-de-sac in the quiet Prairie Park neighborhood near St. Catherine Hospital. Thirteen of those driveways are newly paved, with new concrete sidewalks on one end and new walkways at the other end.

Many of those new walkways continue up new concrete steps and others continue to new patios in the back.

It's as if it was one continuous pour of concrete, from public sidewalks into private yards.

But there is no new driveway in front of Sam Perez's house. No chalk-colored walkway, no smooth patio in the back.

"I told them no," Perez said of contractors who busied themselves in 1999 in his neighborhood and others. "I knew what they were doing. I knew it was wrong. They knew it was wrong, too."

Four years after those new sidewalks, driveways, walkways and patios were poured, six city officials have been indicted.

By STEVE PATTERSON
 POST-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER



Newer pavement continues from the sidewalk and includes a walkway that wraps around a house at 148th Street and Grasseil Avenue.



INSIDE
Film chronicles East Chicago political structure
 Political consultant Chris Sautter finds renewed interest in his 2001 documentary, "The King of Steeltown." **Page A4**

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CONCRETE

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Three city councilmen — Frank Kollintzas, Joe DeLaCruz and Adrian Santos — and three city department heads — Eduardo Maldonado, Joe Valdez and Pedro Porras — were indicted for allegedly leading an effort to spend \$20 million in taxpayer money to get Mayor Robert Pastrick re-elected.

The indictment makes clear that in the months preceding the 1999 primary, a Pastrick sign in one's yard meant a new concrete driveway and, for some, maybe a tree removed.

Federal prosecutors say it was a scheme that benefitted only Pastrick and his allies.

But Perez, standing on his 40-year-old driveway, looks around his neighborhood and sees neighbors benefiting.

He could have had it, too, but he refused to give in.

He refused to put a Pastrick sign in his yard.

"You know what's hard, what's really sad?" the retired steel worker asks.

"My taxes are going to go up because of all of this. And I'm going to be paying those higher taxes just like everybody else, but I didn't get anything done."

Their roles

The 72-count indictments issued nine days ago by U.S. Attorney Joseph Van Bokkelen leave many unanswered questions, but make clear the roles each of the defendants played.

Maldonado, the city controller, was the ringleader, the indictment states, ordering contractors to falsify invoices and finding a way to pay contractors while avoiding city record-keeping.

Kollintzas, DeLaCruz and Santos, the indictment states, went door to door, promising work would be done on private property for citizens who had a Pastrick political sign in their yard.

Porras gave orders to contractors, too. After "Official A" met with an East Chicago church official, Porras then told a contractor to renovate a church parking lot, which included asphalt and electrical work.

But the scenarios spelled out in the indictment make clear none of the officials was as entrenched in the scheme as Maldonado.

If convicted of all charges against him, the 34-year-old father of young children could spend his life in prison.

But the indictment also hints at the potential for future indictments, depending on how cooperative the defendants are with federal investigators.

There are at least three East Chicago officials and one Pastrick campaign official who are not named in the indictment but who clearly were intricately involved in the paving work.

East Chicago's "Official A," "Official B" and "Official C" are identified as meeting with church and business leaders, contractors and others, promising public money for work done on private property.

The indictment also says Maldonado appointed an unnamed Pastrick campaign

worker to supervise all paving work, but it also says "the campaign worker obtained lists for work to be completed on public and private property from the mayor's office in city hall."

Van Bokkelen won't reveal the identities of East Chicago "Official A," "Official B" and "Official C," nor will he comment on any direct involvement Pastrick had in the scam.

Pastrick is not commenting on the scandal, but just days before the indictments hit, he told the Post-Tribune he wouldn't be tarnished in the scandal.

"I don't condone it if people go off and do their own things and get in trouble," he said.

Names notably missing from the indictment include Pastrick; his special assistant, Tim Raykovich, who supervised the sidewalk work after the primary; and key Pastrick campaign aide Jimmy Fife.

Fife has not been seen in East Chicago for several months.

Also not mentioned in the indictment are George Weems and Frank Miskowski, who, together with Maldonado, make up the city's Board of Public Works, the contracting agency.

The State Board of Accounts says those three are personally responsible for \$2.5 million in private work done with public money — money Indiana Attorney General Steve Carter is responsible for recouping.

But according to responses filed by the city, none of the three board members claims any involvement in the scam.

While the Board of Public Works is responsible for all city contracting, the indictment indicates Maldonado broke from the board and contracted with firms on his own.

State audits show Calumet Concrete, H&Y Maintenance, A&A Enterprises, Ace Enterprises, Residential Construction Service and Dave's Tree Service did the illegal work.

But no business did more private work with public money than Calumet Concrete, owned by a Pastrick neighbor.

County voting records show Robert and Paul Velligan, listed as owner and registered agent for Calumet Concrete, live two houses away from Pastrick, in a small, unkempt house, along with four other adults, all of whom vote in East Chicago.

Promises made

There are equal parts shame and fear in the voices of citizens who had their private properties paved at taxpayer expense.

Shame of knowing they benefited from it and fear that if they speak up, they will face retaliation from those involved.

While most of the work done was concrete, the indictment mentions a church had an asphalt parking lot put in, along with electrical work, all at taxpayer expense.

That deal was set up by an unnamed city official and finalized by Porras, who is a member of East Chicago's Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church.

Asked about the still-new asphalt lot outside his church, the Rev. Juan Gonzalez, pastor at Our Lady of Guadalupe, repeatedly said, "I don't want to talk about it," then hung up.

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SIDEWALKS-FOR-VOTES INDICTMENTS

continued



STEPHANIE DOWELL/POST-TRIBUNE

Concrete continues from the sidewalk all the way up a walkway to the front door and wraps around the house at 4206 Franklin in East Chicago.

A diocesan official said there is no record of the church having paid for the parking lot.

The indictment indicates some business owners were misled by those indicted, having been told the city "had a program that would allow East Chicago to pay for work on private property."

One business owner said politicians "offered to make things beautiful," and the indictment states one business got a concrete parking lot valued at \$100,000.

There are houses in the city that have more concrete wrapping the house than they have lawn and businesses that had concrete parking lots and aprons poured around their buildings, without even a break line between the public sidewalks and their private lots.

Some of those who benefited from the scam shut the door or hung up the phone when asked if they feel right about having accepted the free work, while others shrug and reply "everyone else got it."

Contractors tried putting in concrete around George Petrunich's house in the 4700 block of Grasselli Avenue, but he told them he didn't want it.

It's the only part of the block that didn't see new concrete.

"I didn't need it," Petrunich said. "An East Chicago city councilman told me he wanted to do it because he was going to get a cut of how many customers they got, but I told him I didn't want him wasting taxpayer money. My sidewalk was fine."

And that's the way Perez looks at his own driveway.

It's old, he admits, but there's nothing wrong with it.

It's cracked in spots, but so, too, are those newer driveways.

Across the street, he explains, a councilman's sister invited contractors into her home and cooked them breakfast, while the councilman campaigned, making concrete promises.

"A lot of people knew it was wrong," Perez said. "But they had a chance to get something for free and they took it."

"I wanted no part of it."

Reporter Steve Patterson can be reached at 648-3105 or spatterson@post-trib.com.

Film about E.C. race draws new interest

■ Filmmaker saw concrete scandal project as it was unfolding.

By STEVE PATTERSON

Post-Tribune staff writer

An unprecedented look inside the East Chicago political machine.

That's what "The King of Steeltown" provides, looking into the 1999 showdown between incumbent Mayor Robert Pastrick and his former rival Stephen Stiglich.

The 75-minute documentary goes inside a political race that was so heated it has since resulted in six federal indictments.

Since those indictments were handed down nine days ago, there has been renewed interest in the film, released in 2001.

The film provides a look at the city-funded paving work on private property, which led to the indictments.

It includes comments on the work from local political insiders, including Post-Tribune editorial writer Rich James.

Filmmaker Chris Sautter, a Washington, D.C.-based attorney and political consultant, said he wanted to go inside one of America's last political machines, never expecting that indictments would come four years later as a direct result of actions in that 1999 race.

"We had a unique perspective," Sautter said. "We saw some of it (illegal sidewalk work) up close."

Sautter, who had developed campaign commercials for Pastrick in 1995, admits he didn't embark on the project in hopes of exposing anything.

"It was really just to portray a political culture that is something of an anachronism, and I think the film suc-

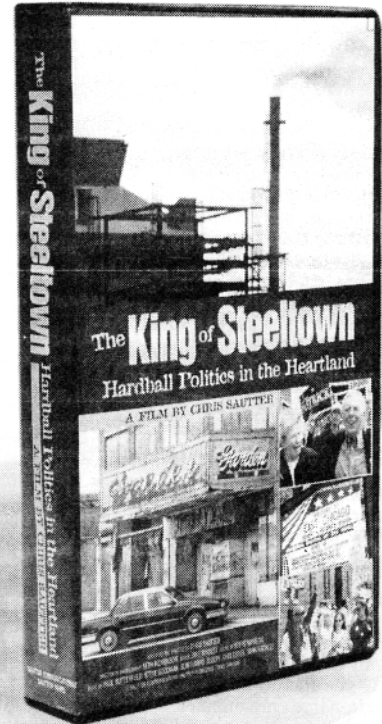


"It was no surprise when I heard about the indictments, but it would have been a surprise if there hadn't been any indictments. ... The machine is embodied in the person. It'll be around as long as he's around."

— Chris Sautter

About the film

For online information: www.thekingofsteeltown.com



ceeded in showing that.

"It wasn't about showing criminal conduct," he adds, "it was about hardball politics."

The film, Sautter admits, "had become something of a political cult classic," with showings at college political science courses across the country.

Sautter will be showing the film Nov. 13 at Indiana University.

Sautter said he was aware of the grand jury investigation that looked into the paving work.

"It was no surprise when I heard about the indictments, but it would have been a surprise if there hadn't been any indictments," he said.

Still, he says, there is nothing

in the film that hints that indictments were inevitable.

"Still, in retrospect, I think the mayor regrets having given me the kind of access he did," Sautter said.

Despite the unflattering portrayal of the Pastrick machine and the city, Pastrick hired Sautter in 1999 and 2003, to produce campaign commercials.

Asked about what kind of impact he thinks the indictments will have on Pastrick's political machine, Sautter doesn't hesitate to respond.

"The machine is embodied in the person," he said. "It'll be around as long as he's around."

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