

Mayor of The City from Another Universe

by Paul Juser



The Bench and the Trees

My arms and neck were sunburned after the Encourage Collective's cleanup that began at Cheri Lindsay Park June 15th. The press release came across my desk while I was grilling candidates for Binghamton mayor on the same subject. Corey Ray, the group spokesman agreed to offer independent verification on the state of the trail, and I was there at 9:00am to pick up cigarette butts and fast-food debris.

The RiverWalk trail was carved out in Mayor Ryan's first term, connecting Confluence Park with Cheri Lindsay two miles away along the Chenango River. The recreational walk passes through a largely abandoned industrial zone, and behind the largely abandoned Binghamton

Plaza. I try to walk the trail as often as I can in the best and worst of the volatile local weather, and I've complained in these pages of the poor upkeep and frequent feces.

Only a few days prior, Ed Hickey gave a press conference on blight at Cheri Lindsay Park, and he had to clean up syringes before the cameras arrived. Teri Rennie told me she also frequents the trail on family walks, but aside from some broken glass, she didn't think the path was in bad shape. Rich David believes the RiverWalk "isn't maintained very well," and if it "looks like a jungle, it would appear to be unsafe and people won't go down there." And that Confluence Park has a "very beautiful and scenic view" that is frequently used by photographers for wedding photos. He believes it's a "positive thing to the community," and wants to take a closer look at better lighting along the trail.

The Encourage Collective is Cory, Pepper, and Isaac, who was already acquainted with my mother through their anti-fracking efforts in the Town of Maine. The City of Binghamton provided the garbage bags and rubber gloves. About 10 to 15 people joined the effort, and the day's haul included not only butts and fast food trash from the nearby McDonald's, but also Taco Bell, Burger King, and other usual suspects. We collected paper and plastic bags, shards of glass,

and Styrofoam. Notable finds including a drill, a vacuum cleaner, and a shopping cart. I didn't see any syringes myself, but I've seen enough dudes staring into car trunks surrounded by pit bulls behind Kmart to know that Hickey's version is closest to the true story.

We achieved at least Isaac's personal goal, reaching the park bench behind McDonald's—only a half mile along the trail—before the bags were full (see photo page 12). I pass the bench often on bike rides, and knew there was a mess, but I was not prepared for the amount of trash. Grass and branches entwined through bags, wrappers, and glass in a nearly solid mat in a crescent behind the bench. We only made it to Confluence Park for a planned picnic lunch provided by Wegman's and the Olive Garden. The Encourage Collective doesn't have current plans for future cleanups, but clearly a greater effort is necessary.

Across town, a nightmare was taking place, or so NYSEG's tree-trimming was described by locals threatened with declining property values. The process has taken place in less-noticeable areas of the city for years, but when valuable rental properties on Riverside Drive were threatened, the power company went too far. Republican frontrunner, Rich David, while admittedly

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Special Police Gazette Movie Review: "LOUIS CYR: L'homme le plus fort du monde"



Courtesy of Les Films Christal
With Antoine Bertrand,
Gil Bellows
Directed by Daniel Roby

Five Police Gazette medals

In last month's issue we previewed the new film *Louis Cyr*, a major release out of Quebec. The *Police Gazette* has a significant role in the movie, so our publisher and culture editor—who speaks French—were invited to the red-carpet premiere at the Place des Arts in Montreal on July 8th. Since then, *Louis Cyr* has been getting unanimously positive local reviews and is having a solid run at the box office; the movie is expected to be the highest grossing Quebec production of the year, by far. Our own review will discuss the movie in general, but stick mostly with the parts about the *Police Gazette*—surprised?

In a nutshell, *Louis Cyr* is the true story of a man born in small-town Quebec who discovers he has enormous strength. He performs astounding feats of weightlifting no one else is able to duplicate and goes on to national and international fame and fortune, greatly helped in this regard by the *National Police Gazette*. Richard K. Fox, the *Police Gazette's* owner, takes Cyr under his wing, promoting him and setting up matches and demonstrations. Fox even travels with Cyr to England where the strongman astounds a European audience. The film alternates this story with Cyr's relationships with family

and friends. Scenes featuring his estranged daughter provide a framing device as the majority of the story is told in flashback. The movie's themes and devices are somewhat conventional, but the entire affair is heightened by fine production, good overall performances—especially by star Antoine Bertrand—and the uniqueness of the subject matter.

Gil Bellows portrays *Police Gazette* owner Richard K. Fox and does an adequate-enough job. He displays some of the spirit and drive that Fox must have possessed in order to become the founder of what we know as today's sensational and tabloid journalism. Bellows did, however, do it with a North American English accent, while Fox would surely have had a Northern Irish accent, having been born and raised there and not moving to the U.S. until he was in his 20s. But this is a minor quibble. Any more substantial problems we have with the portrayal of Fox come more from the writing than from Bellows's performance.

The screenwriters saw fit to not only have Fox hit on Louis Cyr's wife, they had Fox abandon Cyr at the end and support his rival instead. We cannot vouch for Fox on the first point, though we do know he was partial to showgirls. The second point, however, is entirely made up and probably included to serve the story line of the small-town boy who goes to the big city to find fame only to be betrayed by those who said they were his friends, causing him to finally return to the small town where people are genuine and truly love him. The film refers to the January 27, 1894, issue of the *Police Gazette* (see page 12), which features Louis Cyr's arch nemesis Eugene Sandow on the cover. This really happened. But the problem is the film suggests this was a sign that Fox had given up on Cyr and changed affiliation. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Sandow cover appeared while Fox was in the middle of his promotion of Louis Cyr and was part of an attempt to draw Sandow into a competition with Cyr whom Fox never stopped referring to as the "*Police Gazette* champion strongman." The movie is accurate in pointing out that Sandow never did agree to compete against Cyr, but leaves out that three months

after printing the Sandow cover the *Police Gazette* was pumping up Cyr and insulting—as only the *Police Gazette* knows how—Eugene Sandow after it was clear Sandow would not agree to compete.

Another bit of selective truth telling is when a Fox representative is shown making the first contact with Cyr, which fits with the theme of the modest, unassuming guy who suddenly becomes special and everyone wants a piece of him. In fact, as we were helping the filmmakers with authentic *Police Gazette* artifacts, one of the items they'd requested was an older *Gazette* from around the time Louis Cyr was a teenager so he could be shown admiring it and dreaming of the day when he might be in it. This idea was evidently abandoned in favor of portraying Fox and the *Gazette* as being more predatory.

We agree with what's been pointed out by Quebec movie reviewers that Antoine Bertrand carries the film as Louis Cyr. He's charismatic and likable, both on screen and in person. Interestingly, we got along much better with Bertrand at the afterparty than we did with Gil Bellows, who played the *Police Gazette's* owner! Bellows in person was much like his performance: adequate, gets the job done, but you thought he could have been better. Bertrand, though, seems to have greatly expanded the roles he's likely to get from now on as he'd been best known as a comic actor before this. But the naturalness and subtlety he brought to this dramatic performance were eye openers for those who thought they knew him.

Without the *Police Gazette* this movie would still be very enjoyable and would rate four medals. But the addition of the *Police Gazette* makes it an unforgettable classic, so a perfect five medals it is!

Movie-Review Rating Explanation

- Five Police Gazette medals:** You will think of this movie every day for the rest of your life.
- Four medals:** A well-crafted work of art.
- Three medals:** Some parts don't work, but gets the job done.
- Two medals:** Garbage in, garbage out; bad approach executed with technical skill.
- One medal:** Don't see. It'll make you want to die, and assisted suicide is illegal.