



**Legally, Paul Sorvino doesn't appear to owe NEPA a film, but how about an explanation?**

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"Paulie may have moved slow, but it was only because Paulie didn't have to move for anybody."

- Ray Liotta as mob turncoat Henry Hill in "Goodfellas"

Paul Sorvino doesn't answer my calls anymore.

Doesn't return my messages, either.

I realize he's a Big Star who lives all the way out in Sunny California and must be busy attending oodles of exclusive Hollywood parties, taking important meetings with Tinseltown big shots and praying for a sequel to "Goodfellas," but his refusal to give me the time of day strikes me as a shabby way to treat an investor.

He owes me a movie, after all. If you're a Lackawanna County taxpayer, he owes you one, too. The same movie taxpayers invested \$500,000 in five years ago. You may remember it. It's called "The Trouble With

Cali." You can read all about it on movie database websites, but you can't buy a ticket to see it or catch it on cable.

"The Trouble With Cali" has no release date. Or any return on the taxpayers' investment, any explanation of where our money went or any hard evidence that the film actually exists, or ever will.



Where's the movie?

Oh, some scenes were surely shot in and around Scranton in 2006. The Times-Tribune was there to document the hoopla in words and pictures. Many of us here at 149 Penn Ave. were skeptical of the "visionary" notion of investing public money in a private enterprise as iffy as a movie, but once the county kicked in, we did our best to promote the project. A company as deeply invested in this community's interests as The Times-Tribune has no interest in seeing a film funded with public money fail.

Five years and a blockbuster public corruption trial later, however, this newspaper and the community it serves have a pressing interest in asking, once and for all, "Where the (bleep) is our (bleeping) movie?"

It's a question I've asked many times, as have other Times-Tribune editors and reporters. It has become something of a tradition around here to mark the passing of each seasonal equinox with an inquiry about the status of our alleged movie. It has also become a running joke: "Whose turn is it to call Paulie?"

I called the county building Wednesday to ask what the commissioners are doing to resolve "The Trouble With Cali." Spokeswoman Lynne Shedlock said she was "unaware of any developments over the past couple of years" since Mr. Sorvino stormed out of a meeting with Commissioners Mike Washo and Corey O'Brien because they had the gall to ask, "Where the (bleep) is our (bleeping) movie?"

No news about 'Cali'

Mr. Washo, who voted for the initial \$250,000 the county put toward the project but opposed the second installment, said there is no news about "Cali," which he doesn't expect to change. Former commissioners and convicted felons Bob Cordaro and A.J. Munchak greenlighted the deal without a standard completion bond that would have required Mr. Sorvino to produce something in exchange for our money. As a result, the county's hands are tied, Mr. Washo said.

"We've looked at all our options, and sadly, there doesn't seem to be anything we can do (to force a resolution)," Mr. Washo said.

Even more sadly, documents related to the deal back up that conclusion in stark black and white. The following are excerpts from a March 24, 2005, "private placement memorandum" detailing the project for potential investors "the Film" refers to "Cali." "The Company" is "The Trouble With Cali" LLC. "The Managing Member" is Mr. Sorvino's production company, which at the time was headquartered in glamorous Gilbert, Pa.:

-â "It is generally believed that most independently produced films (such as the Film) have resulted in losses to their investors."

-â "â ¦The Managing Member does not contemplate obtaining a completion bond for the Film and as a result it is possible that all the Capital Contributions of the Company will be expended without the completion of the Film."

-â "In the event the Managing Member shall at any time determine in good faith that continuation of the production of the Film is not in the best interest of the Company and should be abandoned, the Managing Member shall have the right to abandon the Film â ¦"

I'm not a lawyer, but all that legalese seems uncharacteristically straightforward. Mr. O'Brien is a lawyer, and he read it the same way.

"Give me your money, and I'll guarantee that I might never make the movie and that you may never see a return on your investment," said Mr. O'Brien, who was not in office when the deal was done. "These guys looked at that and said, 'Gee, where do I sign?'"

'These guys'

By "these guys" he means Mr. Cordaro and Mr. Munchak, but it's not clear they actually signed anything. The county says it has not a single document related to "Cali" that bears the signatures of Mr. Sorvino or the former majority commissioners. Mr. Sorvino has claimed that a signed completion agreement exists, but no one at the county building has ever seen it, and Mr. Sorvino has refused to share a copy with The Times-Tribune.

Whether Mr. Cordaro ever actually signed off on the deal in ink, he clearly enjoyed being listed as the alleged film's executive producer.

"There are some people around who think Paul is here to take," he told The New York Times in a story published in May 2007. "But \$500,000 falls out of trees in Los Angeles. When do you have an opportunity to create a brand-new industry, a cutting-edge industry? It's an incredible opportunity for us as an investment."

Maybe \$500,000 really does fall from the trees in Los Angeles, but no such precipitation has ever been recorded here in Lackawanna County. Linger under the elms around here only brings deposits from the business ends of pigeons.

What is clear now and should have been clear before Mr. Cordaro cut the first check for "The Trouble With Cali:" The movie will never be finished. What's worse is there doesn't seem to be a damned thing we can do about it.

"We could take (Mr. Sorvino) to court, but we don't have much to work with and it could take years and millions of dollars," Mr. O'Brien said. "And there's no guarantee we would win."

So it turns out that Paul Sorvino doesn't owe us a movie after all, at least in a legal sense. At this point, I'd settle for an explanation, but he has made it abundantly clear that he doesn't think he owes us that, either.

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