

# The 'Best' Lex Can Do?

Want Ace on Lex streets? Tell DickD@lfucg.com.

Councilmen Dick DeCamp and Jay McChord are on track to pass an ordinance that would boot Ace's Big Red Boxes off the streets and into a corral. The draft ordinance was passed Tuesday, August 12. (CouncilMembers@lfucg.com; Vice Mayor Jim Gray 258.3202 jgray@lfucg.com; Dick DeCamp 258.3222 dickd@lfucg.com)

The proposed ordinance would herd the newspaper into (city-owned) corrals for a:

- \$200 annual permit fee;
- a \$25 per rack fee downtown;
- and a \$25 per rack installation fee.

Ace would also have to buy all these new racks at who-knows-what cost.

What better way for the city to kick off the celebrations for Ace's upcoming 20th anniversary than with a gift like this? (They didn't even ask where we were registered.)

Dick DeCamp has actually bought campaign advertising in Ace in years past, so we assume he has an investment in the Ace readers he represents, and that he misguidedly set these wheels in motion with good intentions.

Readers are voting now through Labor Day in Ace's Annual Best of Lex. That has an

ironic ring to it right now. Is this the BEST Lex can do? The 19th annual Ace A&E Fall Preview goes on stands September 4—this is how the LFUCG supports the Arts?

Nothing says "Free Press" quite like "Restricted and Cost-Prohibitive Access!"

Readers should feel free to contact Dick and the gang at LFUCG and say, "Keep Ace on the Streets!"

Good luck with that.

We realize everybody is suffering from a bad case of "outrage fatigue" this summer. The triumphs of the bulldozers and short-fingered vulgarians litter Main Street. Vice Mayor Jim Gray does his best to "follow the money" and is stonewalled at every turn.

When councilman Jay McChord characterizes our boxes as "a very ugly scar in our downtown" (in the August 13 *Herald-Leader*) one has to wonder if he's even BEEN downtown and seen what a "scar" really looks like.

There IS clutter on the city streets in the form of abandoned boxes from failed and defunct pubs. They could've been removed and recycled but the Council needed four years and a "Task Force" instead?



## ...The Horse's Mouth

Surely we can all agree that Lexington has bigger problems. (We write about them every week. We've been writing about them since 1989. We've had a hand in creatively solving as many of them as we could.) But here again, the Council has applied a sledgehammer when a scalpel was needed.

And as for these proposed corrals (speaking of scars), has anyone even looked at last year's successful Art in Motion bus shelter project as a Model? Or will they be just another aesthetic atrocity?

The goal of Ace's Big Red Boxes has always been that they would be a signature of a Free and Independent Press on Lexington's city streets in the same way the Village Voice's Big Red Boxes have always been a recognizable symbol of that in New York.

When Stanley Kubrick sought to authenticate his New York City streetscapes in *Eyes Wide Shut*, he anchored those (English) sets with Village Voice's signature boxes. (In fact, it's hard to imagine a movie set in New York

without them.)

It's a sure bet that visitors for the 2010 games know a newsweekly when they see it, and rely on it for where to go and what to do. It's possible they've even seen a *Village Voice* in all their world travel. Or an *Austin Chronicle* (surely the town elders spotted one on their fact-finding mission?). Or a *Durham Independent*. Or any of the other hundreds of newsweeklies supported and relied on by their communities, their chambers, their city councils, their readership, and their advertisers.

Battle-fatigued readers and 1st amendment fans can respond to the LFUCG, and join Ace on facebook for updates. The unofficial Ace microblog is available on Twitter.

We appreciate the offers from downtown businesses like Isle of You who've volunteered to provide an adoptive home for a Big Red Box on their private property. Owner Lori Houlihan writes, "I love psychedelic streetscapes and 'eyesores' like multi-colored newspaper stands and playbill on posts and walls."

The Task Force meets again at 10 am on **August 25**.

Ace is a citywide newspaper with many distribution outlets in Fayette and adjacent counties. If downtown doesn't want a free, independent weekly newspaper on the streets, LFUCG will be happy to bulldoze them under. And use 'em for mulch. ■

—RR

## FREE PRESS: Zengers want to keep Ace on the Streets

A Sampling from the Ace mailbag and Facebook

After reading the article in the *Herald-Leader* today [August 13] regarding the racks for the various free publications in our town, I would like to make this comment. If Jay McChord is so worried about "very ugly scars" in our downtown regarding the various rack sizes/colors of the free publications, you wouldn't be so cooperative in letting the Webb Mafia build another ugly building in downtown Lexington...

—J Thomas Bragg

Though I've only lived in Lex for about seven years, I've determined that whenever the local government desires 'progress' the quickest path is always to pave over a local estate. Idle Hour has long since become a golf course; Beaumont has disappeared under apartments and an admittedly nice Kroger; and Hamburg will be used in future civil engineering courses as a prime example of how NOT to handle traffic flow. That makes three. It just seems logical that the fourth estate would be next in line..."

—Roger Mullins

I really can't understand what the big deal is. In both Louisville and Chicago, you'll find about three times the amount of newspaper boxes as there are in Lexington. It seems like it would be a good thing to have, what with those Equestrian games coming up. People will want something to let them know what's going on around the city. —Charlie Thomason

Dear Council Friends, GEEZZ—I guess the newspaper racks look a bit messy—well democracy is messy. Keep those darned boxes in public spaces—with no charge! Wish you all had the same zeal when it comes to removing barriers for people with disabilities in your districts...What—did you need something to take your Centrepointe frustrations out on? FOR SHAME!

—Bruce Burris

Mr. DeCamp, I'm a proud supporter of yours. I've enjoyed your leadership of my home district and respect your great wisdom...

However: this new campaign against newspaper stands is wrongheaded. It is bad for community.

I believe the impetus for this is, in part, a good one. That some of these boxes block rights-of-way should certainly not be tolerated.

I realize there has been some objection to the appearance of these boxes—that somehow they visually sully our downtown. I would argue that newspaper boxes are the least of the problems facing Downtown Lexington's appearance.

I cannot be the first to point out to you the tremendous fiscal strain this proposed ordinance will place on our community's newspapers...On top of the \$200 annual fee, our community's papers—the Fourth Estate of Democracy—would also have to purchase entirely new fleets of boxes at untold cost, and then pay \$50 PER BOX to place them throughout downtown.

Freedom of the press is one of the most treasured rights in our society. But, as the saying goes, freedom is not free. It comes at a cost...Placing exorbitant extra costs on these newspapers will simply silence them, not regulate them. And dictating the look and color of these boxes seems a micro-managing project better

left to advertising agencies, not city councilors.

There is great work to do in this city. I'd like to see you continue to do the great work you have so often done. And I hope you will reconsider this ordinance, and revisit the power of community.

Sincerely, and with thanks for your service,

—David Schankula

3rd District; Founder, The Lexicon Project  
Member of Ace Community Advisory Board

Every time I wax nostalgic about moving home, I hear something like this or remember the Great Water Company Debacle of the early Oughts. I am reminded that our local government treats Lex like a town of 50K people in the 1940s by issuing ridiculously provincial ordinances while ignoring the city's real needs. I guess Thomas Wolfe was right, you can't go home again...

—Heather Watson

My...my...my what is happening to our city? We have the potential for such artistic greatness and yet each day it is being literally 'chipped' away. We need a revolution FAST! Let's fight the good fight and quick!

—LeTonia Jones



# Long, Strange Trip

New documentary tells story of Hunter S. Thompson

By Charlie Thomason

"When legend becomes fact, print the legend."

—The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962)

In recalling the strange and fantastic existence of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson, one must attempt to navigate between fact and legend—the man and the Gonzo, and so forth. This revolutionary discourse eventually became the basis of the good Doctor's journalistic method and reputation. The Louisville-native would so envelope himself in his story or subject that readers often failed to recognize the difference between Thompson's version of reality, and their own. Far more challenging was the attempt to then document Thompson's life and work (following his unfortunate suicide three years ago). Fresh off the success of his Oscar-winning *Taxi to the Dark Side*, filmmaker Alex Gibney immediately dove into the history and legend of Dr. Thompson. Sundance joyously received the resulting biopic—entitled *Gonzo: the Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson*—like a glass of fine Kentucky bourbon. As Gibney's film now slowly trickles into theatres across the country, audiences have finally learned to taste the overwhelming importance of the legend.

Unfortunately, the documentary lightly glosses over some of the less celebrity-filled facts. For example, Hunter Stockton Thompson grew up, with his two brothers, in an older area of the Louisville Highlands known as the Cherokee Triangle. After World War II, many families moved away from older suburbs like this. When Hunter's father died in 1952, the three boys chose to stick around the Highlands a while longer. Although he attended both Atherton and Male High School, this part of Thompson's life appears in Gibney's film only to spotlight the birth of Thompson's criminal record. After spending about a month in the Jefferson County Jail (which has now been converted into a Law Library) on accessory to robbery charges, Thompson joined the Air Force and left Kentucky.

For the purposes of the *Gonzo* documentary, Hunter's legend begins here.

Gibney's documentary suggests that the key to truly understanding the Father of Gonzo Journalism must emerge from a parade of contradictions. Both *Gonzo* and last year's *Buy the Ticket, Take the Ride* effectively portray him as a master of his own destiny (mostly to shed a more positive light on his suicide).

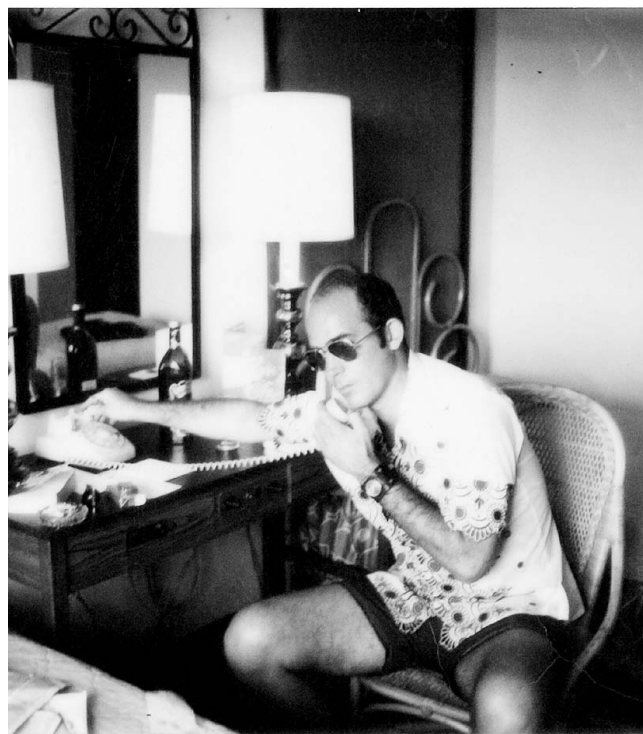
Following the Air Force, Thompson then unexpectedly spent about a year thundering around with Hell's Angels—arguably the most lawless organization around at the time. What better way to then follow a stint like that than by running for Sheriff?

Finally, you top that off with the Doctor's *Fear and Loathing* rampage and you have yourself a very complicated individual.

While *Buy the Ticket* spent far more time with this idea, it becomes fairly clear with any review of Thompson's life story.

*Gonzo's* thesis is that Thompson refused to live by a set of basic expectations or established ethics—he called himself a "freak" and was proud of it.

In *Gonzo*, Thompson's long-time friend and illustrator Ralph Steadman explains that, for the writer, life was always "victory or game-over."



Steadman met Thompson when the renegade journalist hired him to help cover the 1970 Kentucky Derby.

As well as being the real birth date of Gonzo Journalism, Thompson and Steadman's piece, *The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved*, marks the documentary's opening discussion of psychedelic drug usage. The film makes an effort to show not only its effects on Thompson's writing style, but on Steadman's illustrations, as well.

In fact, one of the most admirable elements of Gibney's film concerns the outstanding influence of Steadman's illustrations on the eventual theory and perception of Gonzo Journalism. The translation of Thompson's work onto the Hollywood screen relied heavily on Steadman's ink work, especially in the case of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. There is a great clip in *Gonzo* of Thompson on the phone with a prospective Vegas director who wants to include some animated sequences. The Doctor rips the poor boy to shreds, clarifying that he will tolerate no perversion of such an integral facet of the original work. Steadman's art perfectly reaffirms the visual

style already suggested by Thompson's writing.

Some critics have condemned *Gonzo's* rather excessive amount of re-enactment scenes. Although they may, at times, make the film seem a bit "cheap" or "forced," the average viewer may very well not even notice them among the high volume of legitimate archival footage. Furthermore, the after-effects applied to the re-enactments, while designed to help match the rough quality of the real clips, help establish a definitive, overall look for the documentary. The aged, rustic visual style engages the viewer, as actor Johnny Depp fluidly narrates with authentic quotes from Thompson's work. This directly contrasts with the roughness and force of Nick Nolte's narration in *Buy the Ticket*. (Despite the insightful script by Kentucky native Thomas Marksbury, Nick Nolte's delivery was accurately described in *The New York Times* as, "less like an outlaw than a slightly slow student who doesn't understand the words he is reading.") While waving around a .44 magnum in *Gonzo*, Johnny Depp proves beyond all doubt his uncanny ability to enliven the late Doctor's words.

The only other thing that can be said *against* Alex Gibney's outstanding documentary is his occasional lack of focus.

While *Buy the Ticket* stays very much focused on Thompson as a writer and an individual, *Gonzo* relies heavily on the events surrounding his life. In detailing Thompson's coverage of the 1972 election, *Gonzo* becomes painfully sidetracked by an excess of political history (Richard Nixon, George McGovern, et al.). Subsequently, the film mires down in a lengthy segment that involves former President Jimmy Carter far more than the *Gonzo* Journalist who was so affected by him.

Nevertheless, this disproportionate tangent does yield a successful climax in its eventual comparison to present day political conflicts. Perhaps, the good Doctor foresaw our current situation and feared for the future of peace, liberty, and that never-ending source of inspiration called the American Dream.

If *Gonzo* Journalism means becoming a part of your own story, then perhaps Thompson felt the contemporary American story was one his legend had already exhausted and endured. Either way, *Gonzo* tells Thompson's story as the Doctor hopefully meant for it to be: both the facts and the legend. ■

*Gonzo: the Life and Times of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson* opens Friday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, at the Kentucky Theatre.

Charles L. Thomason is a Fine Arts graduate from the University of Kentucky currently working on his Master's degree at DePaul University. More of his writing can be found at <http://www.recycledfilm.net>