

# Aqua Teens: A happy meal for Jersey?

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a real life bomb scare in Boston in January); battling with mc pee pants, a rapping, diaper-wearing spider; and enduring the never-ending stories of the Cybernetic Ghost of Christmas Past from the Future.

"Aqua Teen Hunger Force Colon Movie Film for Theaters," an 87-minute feature film adaptation that opens today in theaters nationwide, offers more of the same deliriously sly wit: As the Aqua Teens try to stop rampaging exercise equipment from destroying the world, they also learn the truth about Walter Melon, a talking watermelon slice that travels in a watermelon spaceship and keeps company with a miniature Neil Peart, the drumming virtuoso of the prog rock group Rush.

To keep the show from becoming too otherworldly, Maiellaro and Willis gave the Aqua Teens a next-door neighbor in Carl Brutanadilewski, an overweight, balding, mustachioed 46-year-old who has ample amounts of body hair and spends his waking hours in sweatpants, flip-flops, a gold chain and sleeveless undershirts.

"And it's what we imagine everybody in Jersey to look like at that age," said Maiellaro, who added that he was referring only to the state's menfolk. "The women go on to do centerfolds. The men just wear wifebeaters and get pissed at everything."

Carl, who Willis says was "informed" by a college roommate who hailed from New Jersey, also exhibits a slavish devotion to classic rock, the New York Giants, his elevated pool and a well-manicured front lawn (despite his own appearances).

This may sound like an unabashed act of Jersey-baiting from two Southern men — both Maiellaro, a native of Pensacola, Fla., and Willis, a native of Wichita Falls, Tex., currently live in Atlanta, where the Cartoon Network is based. But the two animators point

## Is your neighbor a meatwad?

If there is one enduring mystery of "Aqua Teen Hunger Force," it is the New Jersey town where the animated series is supposed to take place.

Chances are viewers were never meant to ponder, much less ask, such a question. "We've never consulted a map in the six years we've been doing the show," "Aqua Teen" co-creator Dave Willis said in an interview.

So perhaps they could pick a hometown based on the municipality's name alone. Willis and Matt Maiellaro, the series' other creator, willfully played along:

### Little Egg Harbor?

"That sounds too golfish," Maiellaro said.

"I love the name but the harbor implies there's some nature around there. So probably not," Willis said.

### Ho-Ho-Kus?

"That's a funny name. They might consider moving there," Maiellaro said.

### Moonachie?

"Ooh, maybe the Mooninites came from there," Maiellaro said. He then remembered that the Mooninites come from the Moon. "They founded that city."

### Pluckemin?

"Nope. Sounds uptight," Maiellaro said.

### Brick?

"Brick. That's pretty solid. Frylock might hail from there," Maiellaro said.

This reporter regrets not asking Willis and Maiellaro about the town of Loveladies and the Double Trouble Historical Village.



— Ed Beeson

out that Carl, however blatantly stereotypical he is, has played an increasingly important role in helping the show endure on late night television, where it attracts upwards of 380,000 viewers, mostly male, each week.

"He grounded the show in the beginning. He gave it a human connection," said Willis, who voices both Carl and Meatwad. Now he plays a central role in the series. In the "Aqua Teen" film, his character is treated almost like a damsel in distress.

The secret to Carl is simple: Whenever he harangues the Aqua Teens to stay out of his precious pool, he is also reminding viewers that this bizarro world, where fast

food talks, is actually our own. In this sense, Carl is like the Statue of Liberty at the end of "Planet of the Apes."

And however tacky he may be, Carl's everyday concerns have made him one of the series' more sympathetic characters.

"Carl feels like the most cursed guy in the world because he had three fast-food items move into the house next door and he feels like they're dragging down his property values," Willis said. Who could blame him? Especially when in the course of a normal episode, Carl's house gets destroyed, his red Nissan 240SX demolished, and one or more of his extremities crushed, severed or blown off.

As the series progressed, Willis and Maiellaro chose to delve deeper into Carl's back story. What they found was not always pretty. While the motivations of Frylock, Master Shake and Meatwad have always been self-evident, Carl's nature has grown increasingly cloaked in shadow and sleaze.

"In a way, he is weirder than them," Maiellaro said. "He knows people who sell organs at the dock."

It is unclear, for instance, how Carl earns money. "There's a high chance he's involved with spamming people's e-mail accounts," Willis said. "He has cousins with loose mob affiliations." He also has friends who perform plastic surgery in alleyways.

Carl's sexuality is just as dark. He has a fondness for prostitutes, uses pornography to substitute for real emotions and has never overcome his awful childhood. During one episode, Carl recalls a childhood Christmas when his neglectful father gave him carpet samples as presents; later they ate the carpet samples for Christmas dinner.

Willis said part of the reason why Carl became such a stereotype of seedy New Jersey life was because he knew the passion people feel for the state. Recalling his Jersey pals from college, he said, "I'd bust on them for having nuclear waste in their backyard, and they'd bust on me for being barefoot and inbred."

But if he pushed their buttons too much, Willis said, "They would get red with rage."

So it seems strange now that no one has challenged the series' depiction of New Jersey. "Nobody from Jersey has called us once to comment on the show," Maiellaro said.

"Maybe," he continued, "it's just that we've represented Jersey so accurately that nobody has a beef with it."

Reach Ed Beeson at 973-569-7042 or [beeson@northjersey.com](mailto:beeson@northjersey.com).

## BEST BETS

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saic Valley High, Passaic County Tech, West Milford High, Wayne Hills, Lakeland Regional, Pompton Lake High and Mary Help of Christians Academy entered, as did students from William Paterson University, Long Island University and Montclair State.

The subject matter of the student films was also more diverse, but no less dark, than previous years. Amid the usual high school dramas about MySpace stalkers is a World War II film, a mobster movie and a suspense film about a journalist investigating a gambling ring.

The festival begins at 10 a.m. The Public Safety Complex is located at 300 Oldham Road. For more info, contact the county economic development department, which developed the festival, at 973-881-4427.

**"DAILY SHOW" VETERAN:** Paul Mercurio, a former writer for "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," will be performing stand-up comedy this weekend at the Rascals in Montclair. The Emmy Award-winning Mercurio is a former instockbroker who left Wall Street a decade ago to write for "The Tonight Show with

Jay Leno." He is currently developing a fake sports news series for ESPN.

Mercurio performs tonight through Sunday. Tickets cost \$20 tonight and Saturday, \$15 Sunday. Show times are at 8:30 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. tonight; 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. Saturday; and 8 p.m. Sunday. Rascals is located at 501 Bloomfield Ave. in Montclair. For more info, call 973-744-3711 or visit [www.rascals.net/Montclair/montclair.html](http://www.rascals.net/Montclair/montclair.html).

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**JUST ART, NO BULL:** The Red Bull Art of Can announces its 2007 nationwide search for aluminum-inspired art. The contest is open to all artists, regardless of age or experience, and encourages entries in all mediums, as long as you incorporate a Red Bull can.

Approximately 40 pieces will be selected and displayed at exhibits in Philadelphia and Chicago this fall. A grand prize winner will be chosen in each city and awarded an all-expense-paid trip for two to Art Basel, the world's premier modern and contemporary art fair in Basel, Switzerland. Inspired artists can register online at [www.redbullartofcanusa.com](http://www.redbullartofcanusa.com).