

## 'Termite' Watkins' life to hit big screen

By: CHUCK HLAVA  
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Termite Watkins stands with a photo of a proposed poster for the movie. -- Citizen photo by Chuck Hlava In a colorful career spanning many years, Termite Watkins has experienced much: championship boxing, war in Iraq, international coaching and more.

But, if you'll pardon the pun, he's only scratched the surface - now it's time for his Hollywood close-up.

A motion picture is in the works on Watkins' life with Dennis Quaid in line to play the leading role.

The screenplay has been written and Paths Apart Productions will film the movie, which will start sometime this year, with a budget set at \$10.5 million.

Watkins, who lives in Deer Park, is well known in sports circles for his pugilistic successes in Golden Gloves competitions and his ensuing professional days in the ring.

But it was a different fight he put up in Iraq in 2003 that got him a lot of television exposure and front-page media attention in just about all large dailies. But most importantly, a lot of satisfaction.

The movie deal follows a book on Watkins' life. Published in 2006, Termite by childhood friend Suzy Pepper chronicles his early life and deals with his experiences in "The most dangerous place on earth - Iraq."

Watkins and Pepper were schoolmates at North Shore High School.

"I'm very excited and ready for it to happen," Watkins said of the upcoming cinema production during a presentation at South Shore Country Club in League City.

He gave up lucrative offers from other production companies for this story and

found a home with Paths Apart.

"I would not sell out to Hollywood," he said. "I had many offers."

He feels the movie will move audiences as did the flicks "Hoosiers," and "Rudy."

Once the production monies are secured, the movie will likely be filmed in Texas. Texas Governor Rick Perry expressed much interest in having the movie filmed in the state.

Watkins has been a fighter since the 1960s and 70s when he attended North Shore High School, standing up for himself when he felt confronted or someone called him names. He would find trouble or trouble would find him. But he also got himself out of trouble.

Born near the Houston Ship Channel, Maurice Watkins picked up the name 'Termite' when he worked in his family's exterminating business in Deer Park.

He went into the amateur boxing rings, winning the Texas State Golden Gloves and the National Golden Gloves titles and finished with an overall record of 118-10. At age 16, he was the youngest Golden Gloves champion. Then he entered the professional boxing world. There he amassed a record of 58-5-2, including 48 knockouts.

But, later on, came the fight of his life.

After a number of years in the family exterminating business and a few more in new car sales, the U. S. government called. Did he still have his exterminating license?

It seems the coalition forces were busy defeating the enemy in Iraq but were fighting a losing battle with flies, camelback spiders, scorpions and other nasty bugs. It seems no one had thought about that aspect of desert warfare.

Watkins still had his license and felt a call to duty,

much to the chagrin of his wife and kids. He left his successful new car sales venture in 2003 and went off to war. He thought it was only to fight the bug wars but it would turn out to be much more.

"I am called by God to go to Iraq," he told his wife and kids. "I believed it was my time to be a servant," he said.

When he arrived in April 2003, he scrubbed floors, cleaned toilets, in addition to getting rid of bugs.

"When you go to Iraq," he added, "you do everything." But then things changed when Watkins' boxing career came to the attention of Mike Gfoeller, the regional director of the Coalition Provisional Authority, who was interested in resurrecting the Iraqi national boxing program and qualifying a fighter or two for the upcoming 2004 Summer Olympics.

"He asked me what the odds were on that," Watkins said. "I told him maybe one in a million. He told me, 'All we need is one. We don't need the million.'"

Watkins took the job. It was hard work and training, not to mention lots of danger. Al Qaeda put a bounty on Watkins. Guarded by machine guns, Watkins met his team of 24 boxers in a Baghdad soccer stadium. As the sound of war raged all around them, Day 1 began.

The Iraqi boxers stuck with it and so did Watkins, fighting through one obstacle after another. The story is exciting and heartwarming, but movie will show that.

There were times when Watkins' life was in danger. He was in the battle zone several times and even helped in the rescue after a U. S. vehicle blew up.

That was then and this



Termite Watkins discusses the progress of the movie based on his life during a meeting at South Shore Harbour in League City. At right is Karen Lea Aasand, President of Paths Apart Productions. -- Citizen photo by Chuck Hlava

is now, but Watkins feels it's still unfinished business.

"I would love to go back to Iraq," Watkins said. "I would walk down the streets and call a town meeting with (all the factions) and start working one some things right now.

"The tribal leaders really love each other. I've seen it. The bad guys keep everything in turmoil. If I can get our government on board, I'll go back in a minute."

At this rate, following the book and movie, the next project could be a Termite Watkins action figure.

Karen Lea Aasand, president of Paths Apart Productions, knows that Watkins has a special calling for this.

"It's about doing what God asked him to do," she said, adding that "The mission of this company is to show the power of God in their lives." Aasand, along with producer Fred Kuehnert, will be in town for a few days this week for meetings regarding the production of the movie.