

Superman's Earthly Birthplace? It's Cleveland, and It's Embracing Its Hero.

A monument featuring Superman and finally honoring his creators and the model for Lois Lane will go on display this weekend.



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By **George Gene Gustines**

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Superman mania is sweeping the world again, with the new summer blockbuster offering a crash course on the hero and his familiar lore, like his alter ego Clark Kent, his super-dog Krypto and his fictional base of operations of Metropolis. And while Metropolis is often associated with New York, the Man of Steel's true home is ... Cleveland.

The character was first conceived of in the city by the writer Jerry Siegel and the artist Joe Shuster, and now the birthplace of Superman is having, well, a super year.

The movie, starring David Corenswet and directed by James Gunn, was shot using the city as a stand-in for Metropolis. And statues honoring Superman, as well as his creators and the model for Lois Lane (all of whom grew up in Cleveland), were unveiled in downtown on Saturday.

The ceremony was attended by more than 400 members of the public, a group made up of relatives and friends of the creators, fans of the hero and a handful of canines wearing Superman capes.

Sheila Freimark carried a sign thanking Superman's creators for introducing her parents. Her father was an usher at Jerry Siegel's first wedding. He gave her mother, a bridesmaid, a lift home and they hit it off. "They were super parents and they had four super kids," she said at the unveiling.

This celebration of Superman has been a long time coming — its homegrown hero first appeared in Action Comics No. 1 in 1938.

“The city had other things to do and they didn’t take Superman seriously,” Michael Sangiacomo, a retired news reporter and a weekly comic book columnist for The Plain Dealer of Cleveland, said in a telephone interview.

When Sangiacomo first moved to Cleveland and did not see a single billboard proclaiming it Superman’s birthplace, he was disappointed. “We’re the only city in the world that can say that,” he said.



In a statue celebrating the creators of Superman, the artist Joe Shuster can be seen drawing the cover of Action Comics No. 1. Steve Schack for The New York Times

In a 2007 article, Sangiacomo asked, “Isn’t it time Cleveland embraced its most famous son?” That article then led to the formation of the Siegel and Shuster Society, the nonprofit that led the construction of the Superman memorial. (Sangiaco is a founding board member and the vice president of the society.)

Previously, the society had raised money to restore Siegel’s childhood home. (It’s not open to the public, but the couple who live there often allow visitors to view Siegel’s bedroom, which has been turned into a shrine devoted to Superman — the “Superman” actor Corenswet signed the guest book when he visited.) The group also had a commemorative fence installed around the site of Shuster’s apartment and helped with the issuing of a Superman-themed Ohio license plate in 2013 (the fees from which are now helping with costs for the monument).

The Siegel & Shuster Superman Plaza sits at the city’s Huntington Convention Center and include statues of Superman in midflight, of Siegel and Shuster, and of Siegel’s wife, Joanne, the original model for Lois Lane.

The Siegels’ daughter, Laura Siegel Larson, said in an interview that her mother “loved Lois Lane from the moment Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel told her about Superman.”

“Mom especially loved Lois’s self-confidence, ability to think outside the box when solving problems and her courage,” she added. “In her own way, Lois was heroic and a perfect partner for a Superman.”



Joanne Siegel in the 1940s. Her daughter, Laura Siegel Larson, said her father was still developing the personality of Lois Lane when Joanne came in to model for the character. via Laura Siegel Larson

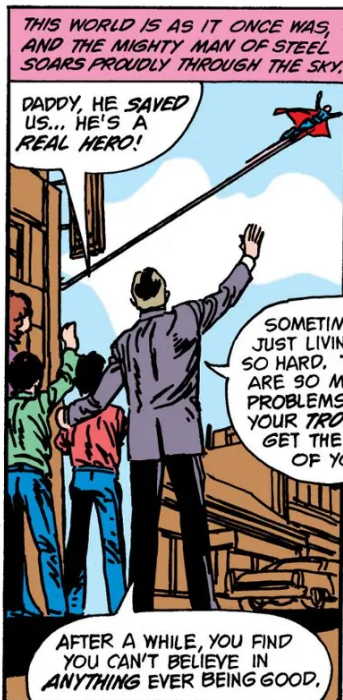
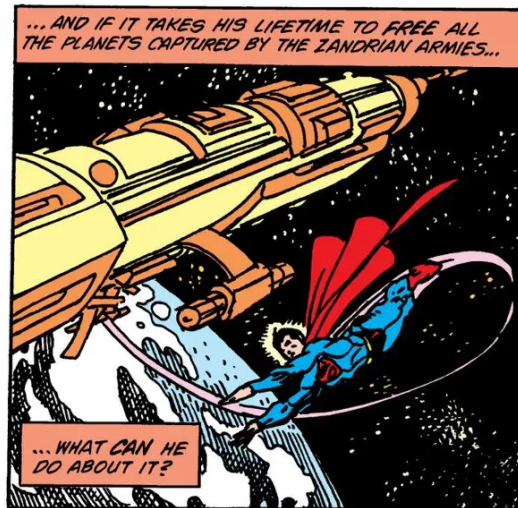
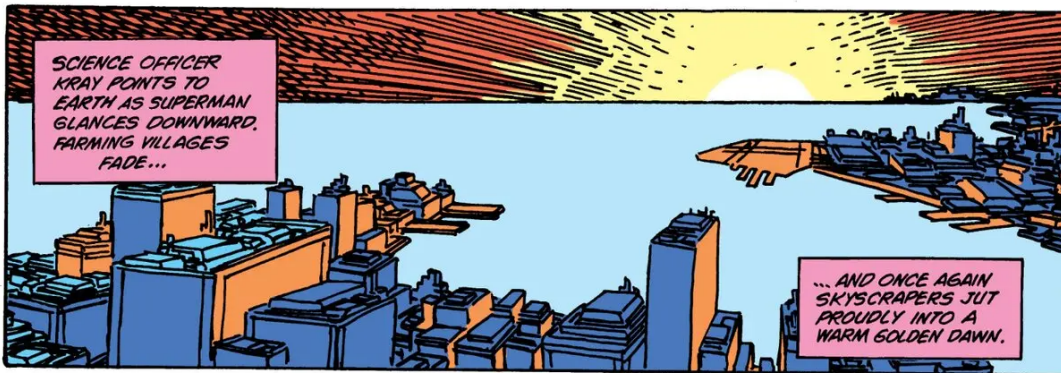
Joanne and Jerry's love story — like Lois and Clark's — wasn't linear. Joanne met Superman's creators when she was hired as a model for Lois. But it wasn't until she reunited with them in New York more than a decade later that she and Jerry became a couple. They married in 1948. (In the comics, Lois and Clark did not marry until 1996.)

The artist behind the statues, David L. Deming, said he began thinking about a tribute when he was the president of the Cleveland Institute of Art. The initial idea, he said, was to honor the creators. But when Deming learned about the back story of the creation of Lois Lane, he thought including her in the monument “made sense” and gave it “that feminine touch that just seemed right.”

For Siegel and Shuster, it was a long journey to publication after they created their superhero. They pitched Superman to many publishers before National Comics Publications, the forerunner of DC Comics, took a chance on him in 1938. Having no clue how successful the character would become, the pair sold the rights to their creation for just \$130 (around \$3,000 in today's dollars). When they later tried to renegotiate, DC Comics stripped them of credit and denied them further work. Siegel eventually became a typist in Los Angeles and Shuster a messenger in Manhattan. It was not until the 1970s that a publicity campaign brought them recognition and a substantial annuity.



The writer Marv Wolfman and the artist Gil Kane paid tribute to Superman's creators in Action Comics No. 554 (1984). Gil Kane/DC



The comic follows two boys from Cleveland — Jerry and Joey — whose belief in Superman allows them to manifest the hero and repel an alien invasion. Gil Kane/DC

The new “Superman” film honors the character’s roots by using so many of Cleveland’s landmarks: the 10-acre Public Square park and the baseball stadium Progressive Field are the backdrops for action scenes; the Arcade, an indoor shopping center, is the setting of a romantic moment; and the 15-story Leader Building — the old headquarters for The Cleveland Leader, now defunct — serves as the exterior for the offices of The Daily Planet. (As Perry White would say, “Great Caesar’s ghost!”)

Justin M. Bibb, the mayor of Cleveland, said in an interview that he understood why Superman resonates today in these “chaotic and challenging times.”

“People want to feel good about being better neighbors to one another,” he said. “And so, hopefully, this film inspires us all to be our own version of our best selves.”

Larson said she was proud to see that even after so many years, people knew and cared that Superman and Lois were created in Cleveland.

What would her mother think of the new monument?

“She would have loved the statues!” Larson said.

A correction was made on Aug. 3, 2025: An earlier version of a picture caption with this article misidentified the birthplace of Joe Shuster. He is from Toronto, not Cleveland.

When we learn of a mistake, we acknowledge it with a correction. If you spot an error, please let us know at nytnews@nytimes.com. [Learn more](#)

George Gene Gustines has been writing about comic books for The Times for more than two decades.

