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Prehistoric Passion: Calgary sculptor offers rare look at his dynamic dinosaurs

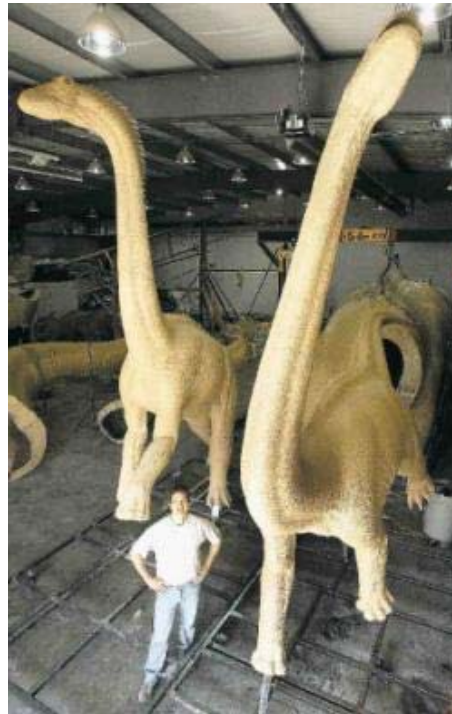
Nancy Tousley
Calgary Herald

Sunday, April 18, 2004

Few people driving the service road along Highway 2 in Airdrie would ever imagine they are near the lair of a 75 ft. long Alamosaurus and her offspring, even though Alberta is well-known for her dinosaurs.

The three huge sculptures -- the two offspring are 25 footers -- are inside the large but otherwise nondescript building housing Cooley & Co. Ltd. Together, they are the main elements of the latest work by Calgary sculptor Brian Cooley, the dinosaur maker who stands at the very top of his unusual profession.

Commissioned by the Childrens Museum of Indianapolis, Cooley's dynamic figures will appear



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8:30 PM
King of the Hill

9:00 PM
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9:30 PM
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10:00 PM
24



to be breaking out of the museum through an exterior wall.

"The dinosaurs will look like they're going to spill out onto the street," says Cooley, 47, who is racing against the clock to finish the alarmingly large mother by the end of the month.

Children in Indianapolis voted to have a long-necked dinosaur in the sculpture and the only sauropod species in North America at the end of the Cretaceous Period was the Alamosaurus. A benefactor who donated \$1 million to the museum was given the privilege of naming them, which she did -- after herself and her children, Yvonne and Greg and Diana.

Cooley, whose work has appeared on three National Geographic covers and can be found at the Royal Tyrrell

Museum in Drumheller, the Field Museum of Natural

History in Chicago, the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, the

National Museum of Natural History in Taiwan, and the Fukui Prefectural Dinosaur Museum in Japan, among others, is

celebrating 20 years as a dinosaur maker this year.

His specialty is working on a large scale, a difficult prospect not many sculptors can manage but one that has suited him since art school at the then

Alberta College of Art. And painstaking research on how dinosaurs looked, the colour and texture of their skin, goes into his work.

On April 24, he is hosting a rare opportunity to see his new, mighty, long-necked dinosaurs before they are shipped to the United States. The event is a fundraiser for the Dinosaur Research Institute. A board

Cooley, above, stands between two of the Alamosaurus offspring in his workshop, and at left he poses with a model of the Indianapolis commission.

CREDIT: Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald

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Alberta sculptor Brian Cooley is celebrating his 20th anniversary as a dinosaur maker and is finishing a dynamic major commission for a museum in the United States that shows a 75-foot long mother dinosaur breaking through a wall with her offspring.

CREDIT: Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald



Brian Cooley works inside the stomach of the mother dinosaur.

CREDIT: Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald



member of the Calgary-based organization, he is a passionate advocate of funding paleontologists to enable them to find and study fossils.

"Can you imagine if you never heard of a T. Rex or a

velociraptor?" Cooley asks. "There are dozens of species we don't even know about. If we had the money, we could find them, and they have stories to tell about dinosaur life."

Paleontology has become an impoverished discipline, he says, as public institutions have less and less money to spend on research.

"Dinosaurs are a huge industry, once it gets past the research stage, when movies and toys are made. But there is no money for research. Hopefully, we can change that."

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Spotlight

A new dinosaur preview and fundraiser for the Dinosaur Research Institute will take place April 24 from 3 to 6 p.m. at Cooley & Co. Ltd., 43 East Lake Crescent, Bay 507, in Airdrie. Paleontologist Philip J. Curry will speak on his recent work in the fossil fields of Argentina at 5 p.m. Tickets: \$18 adults, \$6 children, at the door. For information, go to www.dinosaurresearch.com.

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Tim Hammell, Karla Hanson and Cory Barkman paint the mother dinosaur.
CREDIT: Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald