Local dinosaur builder a world beater

GLOBAL ISSUES

Beamsville firm a model of innovation, writes columnist David Crane

In Beamsville, a small town in southern Ontario, you can find a world-leading company that manufactures, of all things, dinosaurs for top museums on every continent. It is a fascinating example not only of how a Guelph University graduate in sculpture made Canada a global centre for dinosaurs, but also of what entrepreneurship is really all about.

Successful entrepreneurs need two things. First, they must have a good idea for a business, a product or service that other people will want to buy. Second, the entrepreneur must have the capability and commitment to turn the idea into a commercial success. A dogged determination to succeed is essential.

Peter May, the founder of Research Casting International, is an example of something else that is important: experience. He had the benefit of building dinosaurs for the Royal Tyrell Museum of Paleontology in Drumheller, Alta., and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. The best entrepreneurs are often people who have had on-the-job experience, which gives them learning curve opportunity.

But May’s experience is important for another reason. If Canada is to create good jobs and succeed economically in the global economy, it must find specialized niches where it can excel. Canada’s future depends on successful entrepreneurs who can identify and build such high-value businesses, with good jobs, serving the world marketplace.

Research Casting International has become a leading supplier of dinosaurs and other museum exhibits around the world. If you saw the movie, Jurassic Park, you will remember the scene late in the movie where the survivors of the failed enterprises are seeking escape from aggressive raptors by climbing up a giant dinosaur skeleton.

It was built by May and his company, after a cold-call letter to Steven Spielberg’s film company when May read of plans for the movie. In fact, there were two dinosaur skeletons that May built for the movie, an Alamosaurus and a T-rex.

May also built the five-storey tall Brachiosaurus in the main rotunda of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, which is shown defending its young from an attacking Allosaurus.

According to the company, “the display represents the tallest free-standing dinosaur mount in the world.” It also required molding and casting a section of the Hell Creek Badlands in Montana.

In fact, he has built hundreds of dinosaurs for museums around the world, including several in Europe, Asia, and North America. He is now building the world’s largest dinosaur display at the Am. Museum of Natural History in New York.

It is the experience of May, and many other creative entrepreneurs across Canada like him, that gives us the best hope for a successful country in the future.

So long as there are people with clever ideas and the determination and ability to make them work, we should have a good chance in the global economy.

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granted permission to mold artifacts in the Three Gorges in China before the Yangtze River was flooded.

Right now, May’s projects include a major dinosaur exhibit for a Berlin museum and the reconstruction of an extinct whale for the Virginia Museum of Natural History.

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