

Chief Shawn Atleo was appointed the first chancellor of the new Vancouver Island University (formerly Malaspina University-College) recently. Chief Atleo serves as the Regional Chief of B.C. to the Assembly of First Nations, and is a member of the AFN Executive Committee. METRO NEWS SERVICES

Workology *Fast Lane*

Network at Spoke

Check out the first ever Fast Lane networking event July 29 if you want a chance to network with other young industry professionals. The event will be held at The Spoke Club, 600 King St. W., on the rooftop patio. Tickets are \$25 in advance or \$30 at the door. METRO NEWS SERVICES

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'The melding of science and art'

65 million-year-old bones are subject of dinosaur caster's day job

OddJobs

Diane Peters



In 1977, the paleontology department at Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum wanted a technician who could mould and cast fossils. Fresh out of the fine arts program with a specialization in sculpture at the Uni-

versity of Guelph, Peter May thought he could do the job.

At the interview, however, he just wanted to get his hands dirty on the museum's new technology. "I didn't care about the job, I just wanted to know how they were making moulds." Soon, he had dust all over his good suit. "I don't know anything about dinosaurs," he told the interviewer. "Don't worry, it'll come," he was told. May was hired on the spot.

Now, nearly 30 years later, 53-year-old May runs

Trenton, Ont.'s Research Casting International, one of the few companies in the world that moulds and casts dinosaur bones and other fossils, and mounts full museum installations. Over the last twenty years, he and his staff have worked on 250 museum exhibits around the world, including the Barosaurus "Gordo" at the ROM and the dinosaur exhibit at the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa.

Back in 1986, while he was working as the ROM's head technician, May started getting calls from other museums. May would rent space to put together a dinosaur or fossil exhibit, and would shut

down until the next job. "One day it never shut down," says May. Eventually, he left the ROM — business was booming as many museums didn't have the proper ventilation to do work that created fumes.

May re-

cently moved his 20-employee company to a 48,000-square-foot site in Trenton. Here, staff can start with a dinosaur bone still stuck in rock and extract it using chisels, picks and mechanical equipment. They then harden and preserve the fossil with liquid plastic. To duplicate the bone for an exhibit, staff makes a mould out of plastic and fill it with fibreglass, epoxy or cement. The bone's then painted and May's blacksmith — one of his few highly trained staff members, most others learn on the job just like he did — creates the metal armature to put the animal together.

After staff assembles the dinosaur, they send pictures out to expert to make sure the bone placement and pose are correct. In modular parts, the animal gets crated up and shipped to the museum, where staff will put it back up again.

These days, May spends



One of the few places in the world that casts dinosaur bones for museums is in Trenton, Ont.

The Lowdown

Dinosaur Caster

- **Salary:** Up to \$25 an hour
- **Education:** Anything from a degree in English to fine arts to blacksmith training will do — you learn mainly on the job
- **Best Part of the Job:** "Mounting the skeleton. As you're working on the skeleton, you're thinking about the animal, what it was doing."
- **The Worst Part of the Job:** "Hitting a deadline. The museum exhibit is going to open on a given day, and you have to be done. Sometimes when that day comes and we don't have all the information we need, it can become a scramble."

most of his time running the company. But every once in awhile he feels the need to get his hands dirty, so he goes down to the floor to help mould or mount a dinosaur when a deadline is pressing. "It's exciting work. It's working with your hands and being creative. The melding of science and art."

Diane Peters is a professional journalist and instructor at Ryerson University's School of Journalism in Toronto.

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