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Inspiration from the Wild opens at the AGB

By Bill Kilpatrick

On May 30 the Art Gallery of Bancroft was proud to present an exhibit by June's featured artist Maynooth resident Kevin Hockley.

If you think that you are unfamiliar with Hockley's work chances are that you are more familiar with his work than you think you are. If you have been to the Royal Ontario Museum you have been exposed to his work, if you have been to Old Fort Henry you have been exposed to his work and the same goes for the Toronto Zoo, the Smithsonian Museum in New York, the Algonquin Park Visitor's center and many other provincial parks throughout Canada and national parks throughout the U.S. If you have seen the movies Dracula 2000 (2000), Brain Candy (1996), or Bless The Child (2000), just to name a few, you have seen some of his work. That's because Hockley is a world renowned artist and expert taxidermist who has become so successful he is sought after by the world's most prestigious museums to complete some of the most complicated and intricate projects for their displays.

His reputation for realism in his work is truly astounding. Hockley, who has over 30 years experience as a taxidermist, 12 of which were with the ROM as the senior Taxidermist, got his start as a child when he found a dead Saw-Whet owl that had been killed after a storm and he wanted to preserve it. Laughing, he said, ?My mom wouldn't let me keep it in the freezer so I had to bury it in the back yard, but she has since become accustomed to it.?

Despite all his success he has a very down to earth demeanor and a modest way about him. He is also willing to share his talent freely. Shorty after Hockley donated an honorarium back to the AGM that was presented to him by AGB president David Ferguson, Colette Freeman, the 5/6 teacher at Maynooth Public school, spoke about the ?generous? contributions that Hockley has made to her classroom over the years. She said, ?Stuff would just show up,? from replicas of frogs to dead bodies (No, not real ones). She spoke about a Halloween gag that Hockley pulled by placing a fake dead body in a coffin in her classroom that apparently looked so real it gave the kids quite a scare. He volunteered the Senior Display Artist at the ROM, Georgia Guenther, to assist Freeman's class on their Egypt unit and he even let the kids crawl around and over a replica of a prehistoric 40' foot long snake that he completed for the Smithsonian called ?Titaniboa.'

Hockley's talent has gradually expanded from Taxidermy and now includes bronze sculptures, dioramas, recreating habitats for display, movie props, horse sculptures, and human figures including a recreation of a 3.2 million year old ape called Australopithicas afarensis more commonly known as ?Lucy? and much more. Although the Rockhound Gemboree is where we go to see some precious gems, Hockley is truly one of many artistic gems that call North Hastings home.

His show entitled, ?Inspiration from the Wild? runs from May 28 to June 29 at the Art Gallery of Bancroft.