

Local artist unleashes dinosaur in New Jersey



By Sara Valsoney

Hastings Highlands-based artist Kevin Hockley recently unveiled his prehistoric re-creation of the Liopleurodon he has been constructing in his home studio. The installation of the 30 foot long prehistoric creature—which took place at an aquarium in New Jersey—had a couple challenges, said Hockley, first being getting the body into the gallery. The contractor Hockley hired had measured the egress where the dinosaur would enter the building but neglected to consider the mass of the beast. After getting wedged on the ramp the crew had to make a 180-degree turn and back out through a narrow door that they've already squeezed through once. Outside, they dollied past the cafeteria and through the gift shop, a couple hundred meters down to the main entrance and back into the gallery where the installation was grounded.

“Joining the head and tail section onto the body went as planned,” said Hockley, “However, getting it up and bolted to the ceiling was another challenge.”

Hockley rented the proper equipment necessary to help with the installation, but when it came to lifting the massive sculpture it lacked the strength needed to hold the behemoth up. In order to hang his creation in the designated space Hockley anchored it at the centre of three main points. A bolt at each end connected it to the ceiling with six foot one inch diameter threaded rods, “a task that physically drained three men,” Hockley said. They crew spread the grunt work among them taking turns on a large ratchet wrench. Hockley said as they removed the hoist to install the third rod and secure the behemoth tightly to the ceiling.

Having hired a general contractor from Philadelphia, Gardner/Fox Associates set them up with two union laborers to aid lifting and bolting. Hockley and his assistant Kelly Ohlschlager supplied transportation, un/loading, piece fitting, and general construction. The remaining touchups took a total of five days, “five looong days” says Hockley. They finished the piece at 33 feet long and 18 feet across, weighing approximately 750 lbs.

Part of the contract was responsibility for engineering a ceiling supported system and suspension. Hockley contracted this with Criterium-Jagiasi Engineers from Philadelphia. Gardner/Fox opened the ceiling, tying steel pieces onto the existing structure and local shop; NC Boyz fabricated the specialized steel components needed so that everything was met the building standards in New Jersey. The biggest challenge Hockley said was achieving the level of precision necessary to safely display the Liopleurodon.