



Photo by Christine Bierman

Sculptor Robert W. Cooke, right, discusses work with Maiden Bronze Foundry employee Mark Chimienti. Sculpture at left, entitled *The Prospector*, is being shipped to a shopping mall in Canada.

Sandy foundry workers cast sculpture for Canadian mall

by CHRISTINE BIERMAN
for The Post

When a bronze statue is erected this week at a huge shopping mall in Canada, some of Sandy's craftsmanship also will go on display.

The sculpture rolled out of the Maiden Bronze Foundry, 16600 S.E. 362nd Drive, on Saturday to start a 1,000-mile trip to the Edmonton, Alberta, mall.

Workers at the Sandy bronze foundry spent the last eight weeks frantically completing "The Prospector" sculpture in time for the mall's grand opening in mid-August, foundry spokesman Bob Walker said.

The sculpture, by Robert W. Cooke of Issaquah, Wash., will be displayed on the first floor of the seven-story Eaton Centre in downtown Edmonton, the provincial capital.

The piece depicts a Klondike-era miner with his donkey who, upon returning to civilization to trade his gold for supplies, "... walks into the store and gets blown away," said Cooke as he observed his sculpture undergoing its final coating Friday.

The miner's wide-eyed, open-mouthed expression seems to say, "Well, it shore ain't the town it use to be," Cooke said.

The larger-than-life miner is supposedly shocked by the size and glamour of the mall, with its pink marble floors and seven-story atrium surrounded by four levels of stores and theaters. The three uppermost levels are a hotel.

A century earlier, Edmonton was a crossroads for miners traveling by land to the Klondike gold rush in

Alaska, said Cooke, an Edmonton native.

Cooke is being paid \$35,000 to \$45,000 for the piece by the Ghermezian family, which developed both the Eaton Centre and the larger West Edmonton Mall nearby.

Given just five months to do the job, Cooke said he and the foundry worked at a record pace. Maiden Bronze converted Cooke's original into bronze in half the usual time, Walker said.

Cooke relies on Maiden Bronze's expertise, professionalism and speed after doing business with the foundry for four years, he said.

"They do a lot of monument stuff," said Cooke, who does not. He specializes in limited-edition wildlife bronzes, and this project is his most sizeable bronze so far.

In choosing the Sandy firm for the job, Cooke said, "I might have been pickier than a lot of people because I do my own casting. I understand the processes."

Without time to have Cooke's original enlarged first, Maiden Bronze employees transformed the wood and clay study directly into the bronze work, Walker said.

Once the master arrived at the foundry, workers there put in long hours on the molding, the assembly of 100 bronze pieces, and the finishing work, or patina.

"That's damn fast," Cooke said of the timeline. "I'm not doing that again."

Cooke trucked his 550-pound work to Edmonton, where he was supervising its installation near the mall's ground-level main entrance.

The artist purposely left off a base, reasoning that it will appear as if, "He (the miner) has come in

just like everyone else has come in."

Cooke described his subjects as "a friendly sort of guy and a lovable sort of donkey."

"My intention is to have people really relate to it. I hope there are people climbing all over it." It is the first, and perhaps only, artwork in the mall.

The bronze mountain man could have walked out of a history book, with one exception. "He has made an effort to dress up," Cooke noted, "and the only thing he's got is his top hat."

In his effort to recreate a miner of the 1890s, Cooke did heavy research on the Klondike days before spending 2½ months on the prototype. His study included interviews with high-country packers.

As a result of his research, the knots in the sculpture are actual diamond hitches.

Racing a tight deadline, Cooke said he used the "assemblage" technique for some of the miner's gear strapped on the donkey. Assemblage means that the pack, water jug and shovel are actual tools incorporated into the sculpture.

Both the pack and water jug are antiques that traveled across the Canadian Rockies with the Canadian Railroad; the shovel has a hand-carved handle.

Once the original arrived in Sandy, molds were made, followed by the casting of almost 100 pieces in four days.

Those pieces were joined using chains, binders, hydraulic jacks and pneumatic presses, and then welded.

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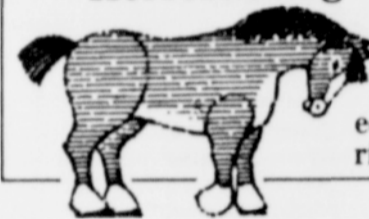
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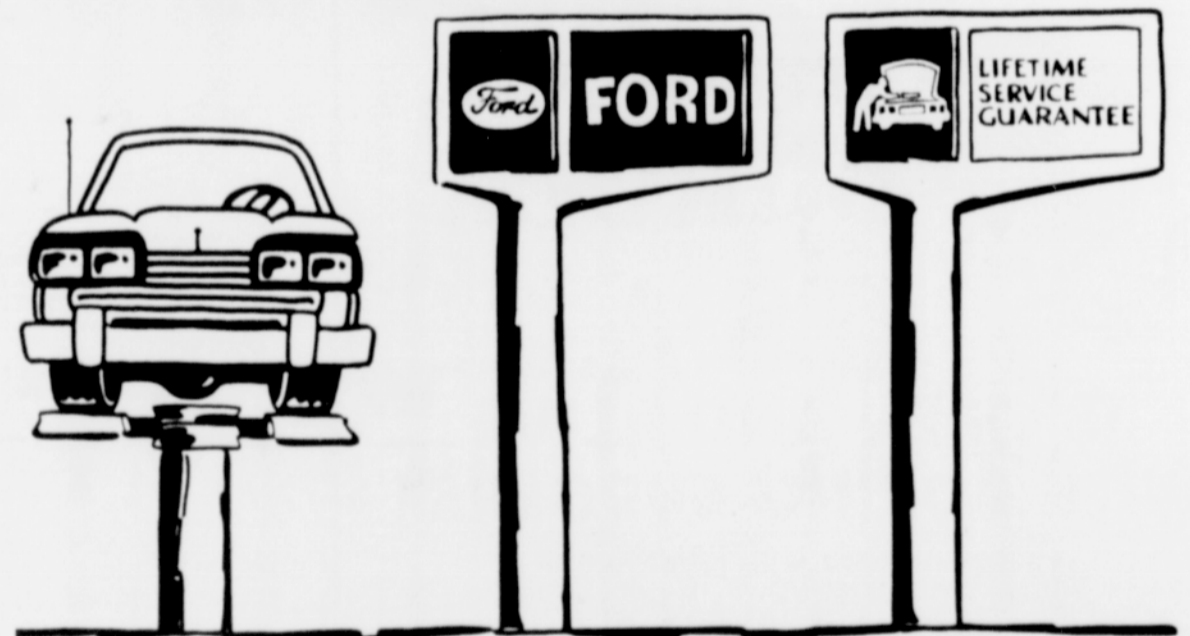
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