

Felled maple tree to become diary of Thames trip

Artist Philip Aziz contributed a tree from his property for another artist to carve.

BY JOE MATYAS
Sun Media

A dead tree from the property of one of London's most prominent artists is destined to become a work of art.

The maple will be hand-carved to commemorate a Thames River canoe trip this spring that duplicated one made by artists Paul Peel and William Lees Judson during the 19th century.

The tree might have become firewood were it not for the vision of carver Paul Cottle and the support of artist Philip Aziz, said Barry Callow.

"Artists look at things in a different way and they've done it again with this tree," said Callow, director of the Philip Aziz Foundation of Art.

Once carved by Cottle, the tree will be a permanent reminder of a canoe trip made June 9-18.

"We only had 20 minutes of rain in nine days," said Callow, one of the trekkers.

Seventeen people in 10 canoes made the 190-kilometre trip from London to Lighthouse Cove on Lake St. Clair, camping along the way.

"We did it to repeat the Peel-Judson journey and to celebrate the Canadian heritage river system," said Callow. "The Thames is one of Canada's heritage rivers."

It was a revealing trip, he said. "The river is virtually untouched from Oneida to Chatham and from west of Chatham to the lake," he said.

"We saw bald eagles, otters, beavers, deer and other animals, birds, flowers and trees that you don't see in the cities."

The trip was organized by the Aziz foundation and supported by donations of tents and equipment from sponsors, said Callow.

The maple, pulled out of the ground on Aziz's property by a backhoe on Friday, has an sizable circumference for a length of about 5.5 metres, said Callow.

Once it has been treated to prevent insects from causing further deterioration, Cottle plans to take six months carving, working six days a week.

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The subject matter will come from the group's memories of things they saw on the trip, said Callow.

"That included acts of generosity," he said, referring to hospitality offered by the Oneida people and the enthusiastic greetings of school children.

Callow said the foundation is negotiating with a company to have Cottle carve the tree in a public place where it can be seen as a work in progress.

The tree will go to Ottawa in 2009 during a national celebration of the Canadian heritage river system, he said.

"Then it will come back to London for permanent installation, hopefully at Covent Garden Market."

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MIRI HENSEN/Sun Media

WOODEN CANVAS: Paul Cottle of London holds up part of a maple tree that was felled on the property of London artist Philip Aziz. Cottle will be carving the tree with images of a canoe trip of the Thames River, possibly to be put on display at Covent Garden Market.