

LOCAL NEWS

From industry to art

Arts council breathes new life into six-ton trencher used in highway construction

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Staff Writer

FORT ST. JOHN — A historical society wants to turn an industrial machine into a piece of punk art with the community's help.

Roger Gregoire, a member of the Northern Trails Historic Society, said his group will donate a trencher that may have been used in the construction of the Alaska Highway to the Peace Liard Regional Arts Council, to be modified by local artists.

Gregoire estimates the trencher machine weighs six tons, and is eight-feet high. Trenchers such as these were used to build the ditches along the highway in the 1940s.

The machine was built by the Cleveland Trencher Company out of Ohio. It's current red colour is similar to that used by the 340th Engineers, the U.S. group that built the Alaska Highway.

The item has had numerous owners over the years. It originally belonged to an oil and gas pipeline outfit, where it was used to put dirt over a trench where a pipeline was placed. After that, it was taken to a farmer, who used it to pull items around.

And after that, Ian Middleton picked it up, not because he needed to dig trenches, but because he needed an engine.

The machine came into Gre-

goire's hands a year and a half ago—with a replacement engine.

The machine won't be used for building highways any time soon, but Gregoire and others are still hoping to put it to use for an art project.

According to Gregoire, a lot of museums have old equipment, but an artistic spin could help bring in a younger crowd.

The trencher will go to the Peace Liard Regional Arts Council, who plan to put out a call for artists at the end of November to do something new with it.

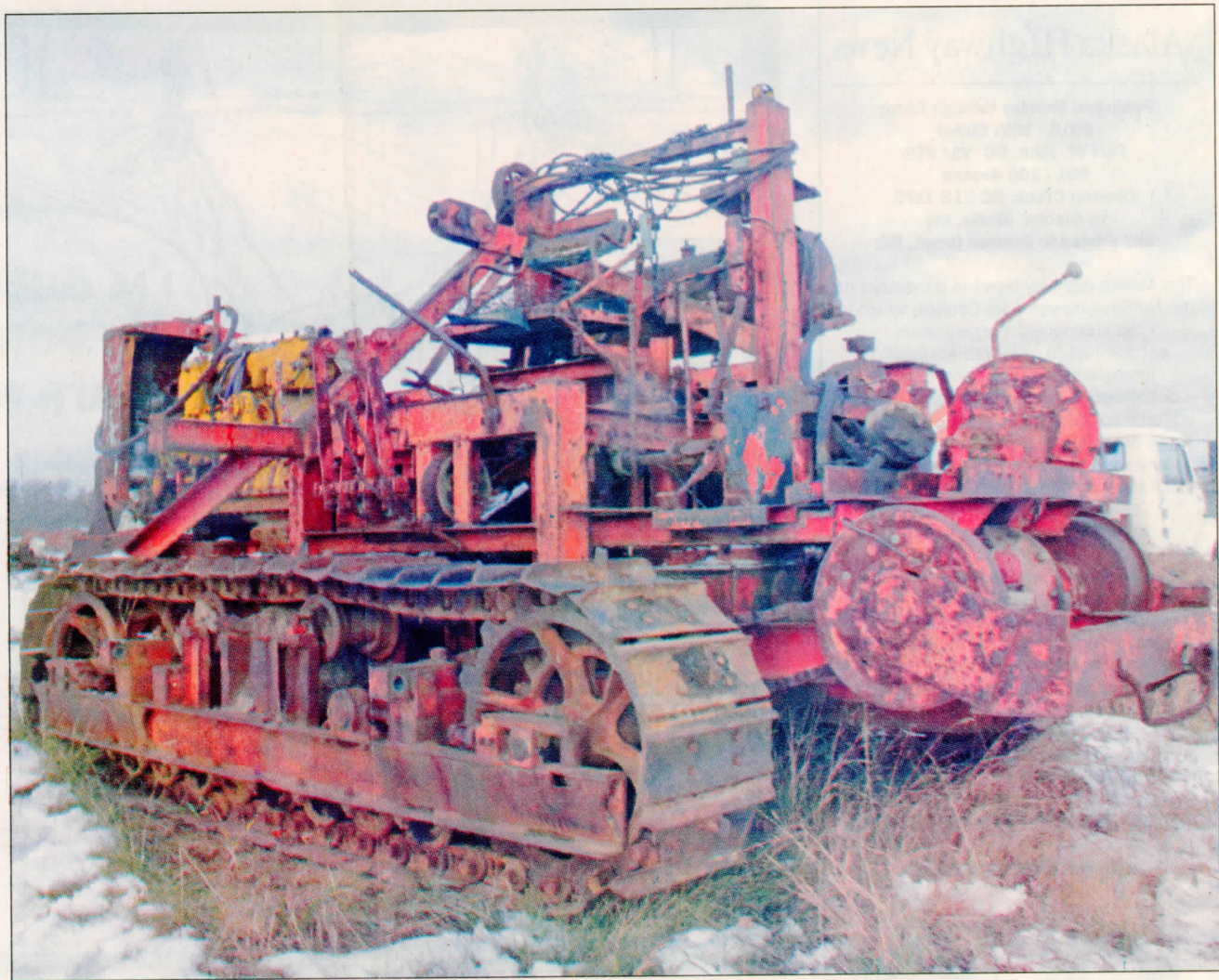
"We've got some fairly high-end artists who will give general advice and oversight of the project," said Donna Kane, the council's executive director.

"Hopefully, after the end of this year, we'll have identified the artists who are working on it, and then through 2016 they will be modifying (the trencher)."

The council hopes to have the project finished in time for the Alaska Highway's 75th anniversary in 2017. Kane said her group has not determined where the final project would end up.

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NEWS



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FOUR ARTISTS TO
TURN TRENCHER
INTO SCULPTURE

LOCAL/A7

Call for artist submissions for trencher public art project

DEC 1, 2016

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Peace Region artists have the opportunity to be part of a public art project will be on display in the region for years to come.

In celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Alaska Highway, the Peace Liard Regional Arts Council is working with regional artist to turn an old trencher used in the construction of the highway into a public art sculpture.

The PLRAC is looking for local artist to submit designs that will be displayed on the caterpillar tracks of the trencher.

Guidelines include creating a design that reflects the artist's view of the Northeast.

Designs should be as simple as possible, as they will be laser cut onto metal plates that will be installed on the caterpillar tracks.

The curators and advisor of the project will select three to five designs, and those selected will receive \$500.

The main work on the trencher is being done by three Peace Region artists under the guidance of world-renowned indigenous artist Brian Jungen. Indigenous artist Adrienne Greyeyes will work on the engine, covering it with beads made of enameled aluminum.



Detail of the trencher tracks.

Rolla artist Emilie Mattson will transform the two fuel tanks into dioramas that will depict a small scale replica of the highway's history from a pioneer perspective.

Karl Mattson, also of Rolla, will modify the grill and radiator using found objects and steel transforming it into an ambiguous animal like figure, providing a perspective on the natural history of the region.

Artists interested in submitting a design for the tracks have until Dec. 15. Designs should be emailed to Donna Kane at dkane@pris.ca

HISTORIC HIGHWAY TRENCHER ON THE MOVE



GETTING OFF TO ROLL: Tyler Kosick, Brad Whiffin, and Denny Whiffin of Trans Carrier Ltd. load a trencher used in the construction of the Alaska Highway at a property in Fort St. John Thursday morning. The trencher was taken to a farm in Rolla, where four artists will collaborate on transforming it into a sculpture celebrating the highway's 75th anniversary. **More on A6.**

BRONWYN SCOTT PHOTO