

ONE MAN'S DREAM, A NATION'S LEGACY

CANADIAN ARTIST SEEKS TO CREATE A NATIONAL MONUMENT TO THE FROZEN GAME

BY JOHN GRIGG

TIM SCHMALZ is an artist, a hockey fan and a patriot.

During a visit to Canada's capital city of Ottawa, Schmalz made a point of searching out the national hockey monument. But he ran into a problem. There wasn't one.

Schmalz was flabbergasted. It never occurred to him there wouldn't be a monument to Canada's game in Canada. So he decided there was only one thing to do: Create one himself.

Schmalz has built a reputation as one of Canada's preeminent Christian sculptors, his crowning achievement being a visit to the Vatican, where he presented the late Pope John Paul II with a sculpture of the Holy Family.

But he's made secular pieces as well. And with his latest endeavor, Schmalz is tackling what he considers a cultural phenomenon, a metaphor for Canadian life, even.

"I'm an artist who looks for positive things to depict," he said. "Some of my peers would look at hockey and say, 'Hockey? That's white-trash (stuff). That's not real artwork.'"

"What I hope this will do is acknowledge in a way never done before the benefit and importance of hockey as a cultural force in our society. I want to encourage the mythology of Canadian hockey."

And he wants to do it on a grand scale.

In his mind's eye, Schmalz sees a bronze, winter landscape rising 40-50 feet and appearing on the horizon as travelers round a bend in a road. At the top, frozen trees in the shape of a maple leaf; below, hockey players in a variety of game-play poses becoming larger, more lifelike and more prominent closer to the ground until, finally, at eye-level, life-sized figures "jump out of the sculpture."

To support a piece so large, Schmalz needs a large base. He plans an NHL-sized "ice" rink made of white marble that visitors can walk on, thereby becoming part of the piece themselves. Black granite pucks will dot the surface, commemorating contributions to Canada's game from people around the world.



Tim Schmalz is taking a model of his concept on a cross-Canada tour.



"The bronze part of the monument generally recognizes hockey as a cultural part of Canada," Schmalz said. "And then the base... where someone can spend an afternoon looking at the different people honored, an eternal shrine to anyone who has accomplished something in hockey."

To finance the project, Schmalz is going on the road with a 10-foot wooden model of the monument, which has already made appearances at the Canadian Hockey League's 2008 Memorial Cup tournament in May, the Dan Snyder Banquet in July and the International Hockey Hall of Fame in August.

The official cross-country tour began on Sept. 21 at Signal Hill, a National Historic Site of Canada, which is just outside St. John's, Nfld. After a whirlwind tour of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, the model is at the Birthplace of Hockey Windsor Heritage Centre in Windsor, N.S., where it is scheduled to stay until the end of October.

Schmalz wants the monument to be built for and by Canadians. The tour will take him across Canada from east to west. Along the way he'll be asking for a loonie (Canada's one-dollar coin) from everyone who comes to see the model. Those who make a donation will receive a hockey card recognizing their contribution to the monument.

Schmalz plans to stop in as many small towns and cities as possible.

"Instead of sitting here working on the model

in my studio, I want to work on it in every province," he said. "So it's truly made in Canada."

As for how much the project will cost, Schmalz said that's really up to individual Canadians. Most of the money will go towards preparing the still-undecided-upon site for the finished product.

"What I don't know right now is how much money I can raise," he said. "The more people who donate a loonie, the bigger the piece will be. The piece can grow."

Schmalz is wary of government and corporate funding. He doesn't want to tarnish the spirit of the entire project – namely, 'Made For and By Canadians (who wanted to)' – with a "tax cloud." Nor does he want it to become The (corporation name here) National Hockey Monument.

"I want people to feel that ownership (over the monument) and I think they would lose that if one corporation just wrote a check for the whole thing," he said.

But Schmalz also recognizes corporate support could be crucial to the project. So he has talked with Canadian companies about finding a way to help get his message to people he can't get it to himself.

"That's my problem," he said. "I'm only one man and it's only one model. Right now it's just me and my truck."

For more information, visit hockeymonument.com. ■