

Lawrence fossil hunter spurs evolution debate with his sculptures

LAWRENCE (AP) — Alan Detrich is gluing together hundreds of pebble-sized pieces of fossilized Tyrannosaurus rex and Triceratops bones to create a sculpture of Jesus lying in his tomb.

Another of Detrich's sculptures features a fossilized T. rex tooth. He believes dinosaurs were among God's first creations and that their remains are the ideal artistic

medium with which to get people talking about evolution, a theory he considers implausible.

"I'm doing something no one else can do, and I think I can find a market for it," he said. "No one else is making religious icons out of dinosaur bones. The only way I can fail is if I quit trying."

Detrich, a mostly retired fossil hunter who has a master's degree in

fine arts from Wichita State University, thinks his unusual background led him to this point.

As a fossil hunter, his claim to fame is a nearly complete T. rex that he and his brother, Robert, came across in 1992 in South Dakota. Detrich said the remnants of the meat eater, dubbed Samson, are worth millions but won't reveal their exact worth because he signed

a nondisclosure agreement with the buyer, British corporate raider Graham Ferguson Lacey.

Its skull is "among the best if not the best of any T. rex ever found," said Matt Lamanna, assistant curator for vertebrate paleontology at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, which cleaned and studied it.

Neither Detrich nor his brother are trained paleontologists. Their interest was sparked by their father, an oil explorer, who brought home core samples filled with fossils to show his sons.

"So I've always been exposed to the earth and the abundance of fossil here," Detrich said during a recent interview at a coffee shop near the University of Kansas, where he took classes last year in paleontology and art, casting more than \$100,000 in gold to include in his sculptures.

He lives in a Best Western hotel, despite several lucrative discoveries — Samson among them — that generated enough publicity to land him on a list of the top 50 single men

in a 2001 issue of People magazine.

As a young man, Detrich invested in oil while also running an antiques business in the western Kansas town of Great Bend. He said the oil hunting taught him about fossils, and the antiques shop taught him another lesson: "The money is where the pizzazz is."

He continued: "If it looks like it will eat a 10-year-old boy, it's a big winner."

He was soon unearthing a type of prehistoric underwater predator that resembles a dragon from the bottom of what was once a giant ocean — now the Kansas prairie. The giant sea creatures, called mosasaurs, are worth big money to collectors from Asian countries where the dragon is a symbol of power in folklore and art.

One of Detrich's finds now resides near a collector's swimming pool. Other fossil finds are in overseas museums.

The Samson T. rex is heading overseas as well after a New Jersey-based preparation firm recently finished cleaning and mounting the

Volunteers honored at 'hat party'

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for twelve ladies decked out in every kind of a hat imaginable. Those present for an afternoon of fun-and finger foods provided by Laura were Lois Starns, Lucille Bruns, Louise Smith, Chris Furches, Patsy Kahle, Juanita Repshire, LaVonne Baxter, Marge Ausmus, Judy Gfeller, Dianne Kvasnicka, Mabel Berndt, and Jean Lowe.

Dorothy Peitz and Becky

Upshaw of Garden City, Norma Straub of Denver, Alfred Ausmus, Richard and Laura Ausmus, Rod Ausmus, Rick Ausmus, Dustin and Casey all of Colorado Springs, Larry and Michele Werth, Wyatt and Layton of Brewster, Gary and Marilyn Ochs and Lane, Roger and Marge Ausmus and Glen Ausmus were special guests of the bride at the Duff/Lamb wedding.

Norma Straub and Al Ausmus were house guests of Roger and Marge Ausmus and Glen Ausmus, Richard and Laura Ausmus, Rod,

Rick, Dustin and Casey Ausmus were house guests of Gary and Marilyn Ochs and Lane.

Lois Starns, LaVonne Baxter, Ruth Smith and Jean Lowe attended the WPAA measure x measure concert in Oakley Wednesday evening.

Donita Goyen and Judy Gfeller left Thursday to visit their respective families in McPherson and Marion.

Donita will accompany Doug and Tandy Wine and Spenser to Branson, Mo., for a family reunion on the weekend.

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