



Tantramar's Lady Titans Flying High

Page 7



Live Bait Presenting One-Act Play

Page 10



Researchers Study Tree Rings

Page 5

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PAGE 5

MAD Lab Opens At Mount A To Predict Climate Patterns

By CHRISTINA SCHELLEN
Special To The Tribune-Post

Mount Allison University's MAD Lab officially opened its doors on Friday, Jan. 21 to anyone wanting to know the exact date of an old building or tree.

The Dendrochronology Laboratory, also known as the MAD Lab, is the only one of its kind in Atlantic Canada. The lab collects information that is used for analyzing and predicting long-term climate patterns.

Mount Allison geography student Nigel Selig said the lab is used to research tree rings to determine past weather climates.

Selig said a tree makes a new ring every year, so that ring signals the time of year it was growing. If a tree doesn't like cold weather and it's cold out one year, the ring will be smaller on average.

"By measuring all the rings we can create a little graph," he said.

Selig said him and his teammates dated the Campbell Carriage Factory in Sackville because the date of the

building was in question.

It was first thought the factory was built in 1838, but using archeology methods it was determined that it was actually built in 1844.

He said the students' main goal is to establish more climate data and find a longer chronology of trees in Sackville and the Maritimes.

"Right now there's little known date of past climates, so from the findings we will find future climates," Selig said.

He said students travelled to Newfoundland and Jasper, Alta. in search of samples.

"We go where we have projects to do," Selig said. "What we are trying to do is cover a base in the Maritimes.

We are trying to go to certain locations because it's not just a Sackville thing, we want to make it a Maritime thing."

He said predicting climate patterns is now becoming a tool that's more and more respected because trees are sensitive to changes in the climate.

"If we can figure out what species of trees does what in past climates, it

can help us understand what happened in the past," he said. "By going back in the past it's easy to see in the future."

Mount Allison geography assistant professor Colin Laroque said they measure a tree to the thousandth of a millimetre to see the slight undulations and differences in growth. These patterns are telling them more about the environment that the tree was growing in.

"What we are looking at is an environmental signal captured in time by a tree," Laroque said. "What we use is that environmental signal to tell us a little bit more about the past. We weren't there to see what was happening in that location at that time."



Nigel Selig, a Mount Allison University geography student, is holding a cross section of a tree cut on Nov. 24, 2004 on 44 Queens Road in Sackville. The official opening of the Dendrochronology Laboratory was on Friday, Jan. 21. The lab is the only one of its kind in Atlantic Canada. (Schellen)