

Cory Trepanier tells students of his experiences in the north

By Bill Rea

Looking at pictures of natural scenes can be impressive, but there's nothing quite like getting out and experiencing them.

That's what Albion artist Cory Trepanier believes.

He made that point recently when he was the keynote speaker at the Year-in-review Breakfast for the Specialist High Skills Major Program at Humberview Secondary School in Bolton.

In addition to being a landscape painter, Trepanier is also a film maker and explorer. He was named one of Canada's top 100 explorers by Canadian Geographic in 2015. As well, he's a Humberview alumnus.

He said painting the wilderness has been his passion for years, commenting encounters with nature in his youth have helped shape his life.

Some of those encounters might have been rather frightening at the time. He showed videos of some of them, including one taken from Ellesmere Island, in which three white Arctic wolves approached his tent as he was about to turn in for the night, going on either side. "I could barely breathe," he recalled.

"Encounters like that leave a mark on you that never goes away," he added, commenting he wants to experience as many of them as he can.

Trepanier said he's always loved to draw, and from an early age, he liked to go outside with an easel and paint wildlife. He said painting what he sees in the environment gives him more of a sense of reality.

He also talked of his experiences canoeing in the north. "It's a great way to connect with nature intimately," he remarked.

Trepanier talked of some of his projects. Coast to Canvas saw him taking his family on a tour along the northern shores of Lake Superior and Georgian Bay. It resulted in 30 paintings that led to his first touring museum. It also led to a 45-minute film called A Painter's Odyssey, which was aimed at helping people connect with what he was painting.

He also spoke about his fifth film, Into the Arctic, which he said is the biggest project of his career.

It required him to work closely with Parks Canada, since this involved a lot more than a little trip.

"You can't go to these places and spend a weekend," he observed, adding it takes about three or four days to ooze away from the regular routine.

There were four on the nine-week expedition, with Trepanier being joined by his brother, a friend and a cameraman. The purpose, he said, was to experience the landscape first hand so he could paint it more meaningfully.

He added one of his paintings hung at the Canadian Embassy in Washington.

"You feel very tiny in these huge, vast places," he said.

There are different types of encounters experienced on a trip like this.

The encounters with wildlife included muskox; an "incredible beast that looks prehistoric."

"What you don't want to do is get close to them," he added.

There were other encounters with wolves.

"They just show up," he said. "They're a top-of-the-line predator."

They also saw polar bears, knowing that was an animal they didn't want to mess with. He said they're beautiful, but powerful.

One of the videos he showed depicted him trying to paint a scene while being attacked by mosquitoes.

"For a view like that, it's a small price to pay," he remarked.

Trepanier also got to meet people representing different cultures. He was sharing a tent with a man and the two ended up playing Monopoly. Trepanier said he was soundly beaten.

There's also history up there, but Trepanier said the landscape is the biggest reason for going there.

"It's really an incredible land," he declared. "The humbling experience of being up there is something I think everybody should get into their blood."

There were also some amusing and frustrating occasions in the videos. In one, he was in a raft approaching an iceberg he wanted to paint, and it collapsed just as he was setting up his equipment.

"I guess I won't be painting that one," he said on the video.



Cory Trepanier told of some of his experiences travelling and painting in the Arctic when he spoke to students and staff at Humberview Secondary School recently. Photo by Bill Rea