

# Culture ... Arts ... Entertainment

## INVERNESS ORAN

### 453 year old white cedar trees get new life in Cape Breton

-by April MacDonald

They were born and raised on the west coast, but have found their forever home here in Nova Scotia.

The Friends United Cultural Centre is a unique and spiritual place determined to highlight the incredible talents of First Nations visual artists and collaborations between non-native and native artists as well.

The Friends United project was designed and created to honour First Nations people – it is the brainchild of German real estate mogul, entrepreneur, art dealer, and publisher, Rolf Bouman.

The story of the desire for totems came from Gerry Sheena, a First Nations artist and wood carver.

Initially, said Bouman, there were two very large trees in Malagawatch that were on property owned by Bouman. They were very near utility poles and needed to come down.

For a wood carver like

Sheena, however, he was looking for “real trees” – you know the massive behemoths one would find in British Columbia.

Bouman inquired, “What do you mean ‘real trees?’” There are plenty of real trees in Nova Scotia.”

“The ones from Malagawatch were about 150 years old,” said Bouman.

This was all taking place just before the COVID-19 pandemic descended upon the world.

Never one to shy away from a challenge, Bouman sourced out seven White Cedar trees that had been cut and were on their way to a lumberyard in Surrey, BC.

“It would be a seven-day trip for the trees to get here,” said Bouman.

However, the trees are 40 feet long and five feet wide and weigh between six to eight tonnes, therefore only two would fit on a transport truck. And it was about \$30,000 to have them driven to Nova Scotia from BC.

Totem poles are predominantly created by

Northwest Coast Indigenous peoples. They tend to showcase a Nation’s, family’s, or individual’s history and displays their rights to certain territories, songs, dances, and other aspects of their culture. They can also be used as memorials and to tell stories.

About Gerry Sheena: He was born on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1964, in Merritt, BC, and is a member of the Coast Salish Nation.

Sheena has been carving since 1990.

“While growing up, he spent hours watching his brother Roger Swaikum carving, and though he is mainly self-taught, Gerry has received some guidance from Henry McKay, and renowned Kwakwaka’wakw artist Stan Hunt III. Hunt in particular assisted Sheena in refining his detailing, which is reflected by the superb finish of his current pieces.” (From Canadian Indigenous Art website)

Sheena attended the Emily Carr School for two years and Langara Community College for one year, where his studies



At the entry way of the Friends United International Convention Centre stands this totem pole carved by First Nations artist Gerry Sheena. The white cedar trees were shipped from British Columbia and now add even more to an already robust collection of native artwork from all across Canada.

### White cedar trees get new life

focussed on the Fine Arts.

His private work can be found throughout galleries in BC as well as the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia.

His carving style is traditionally Salish, informed by modern painting techniques and innovative use of colour and design.

Bouman created a woodworking shop for Sheena and inside there are sections

of the White Cedar (and smell that is so lovely and intoxicating to the senses).

Being with the trees one could feel how ancient they were.

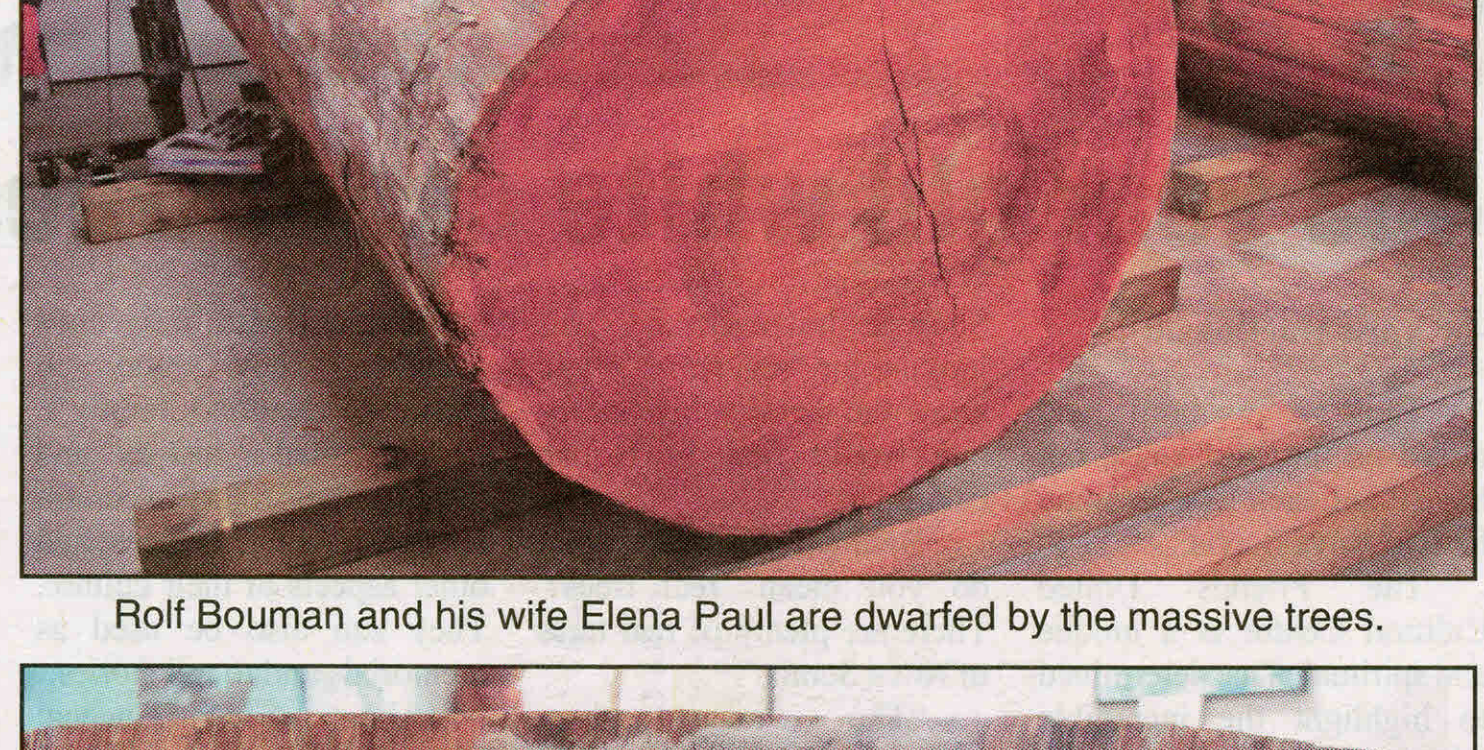
The Friends United International Convention Centre is a must-see experience. It is more than 20,000 feet in size and is the largest of its kind in Canada.

It was constructed by the Bouman Group of companies for the purposes

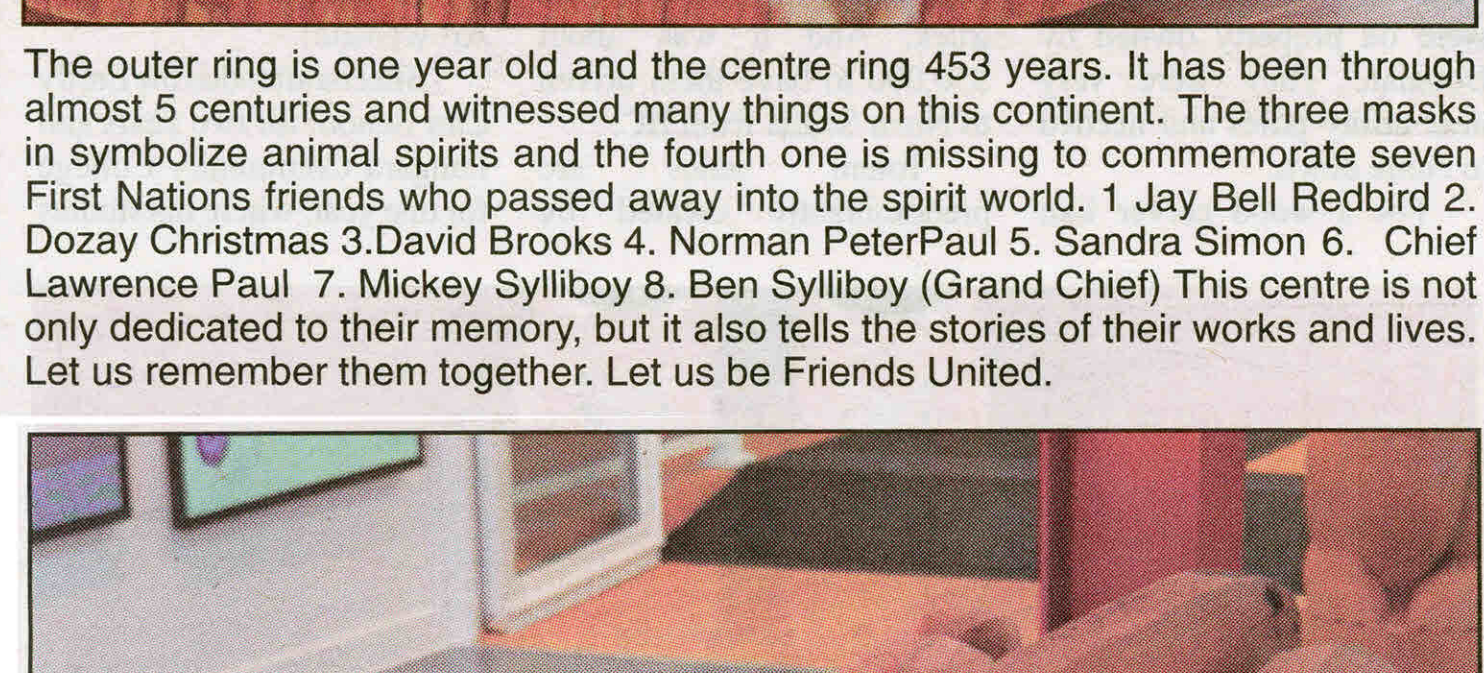
of honouring all Indigenous North American Peoples to celebrate their culture and heritage.

It features collections of paintings, totem poles, carvings, Inuit stone sculptures, quill baskets, and many other First Nations cultural items of significance.

Check out [www.friends-united.ca](http://www.friends-united.ca), book a time, and go see this incredible facility for yourself.



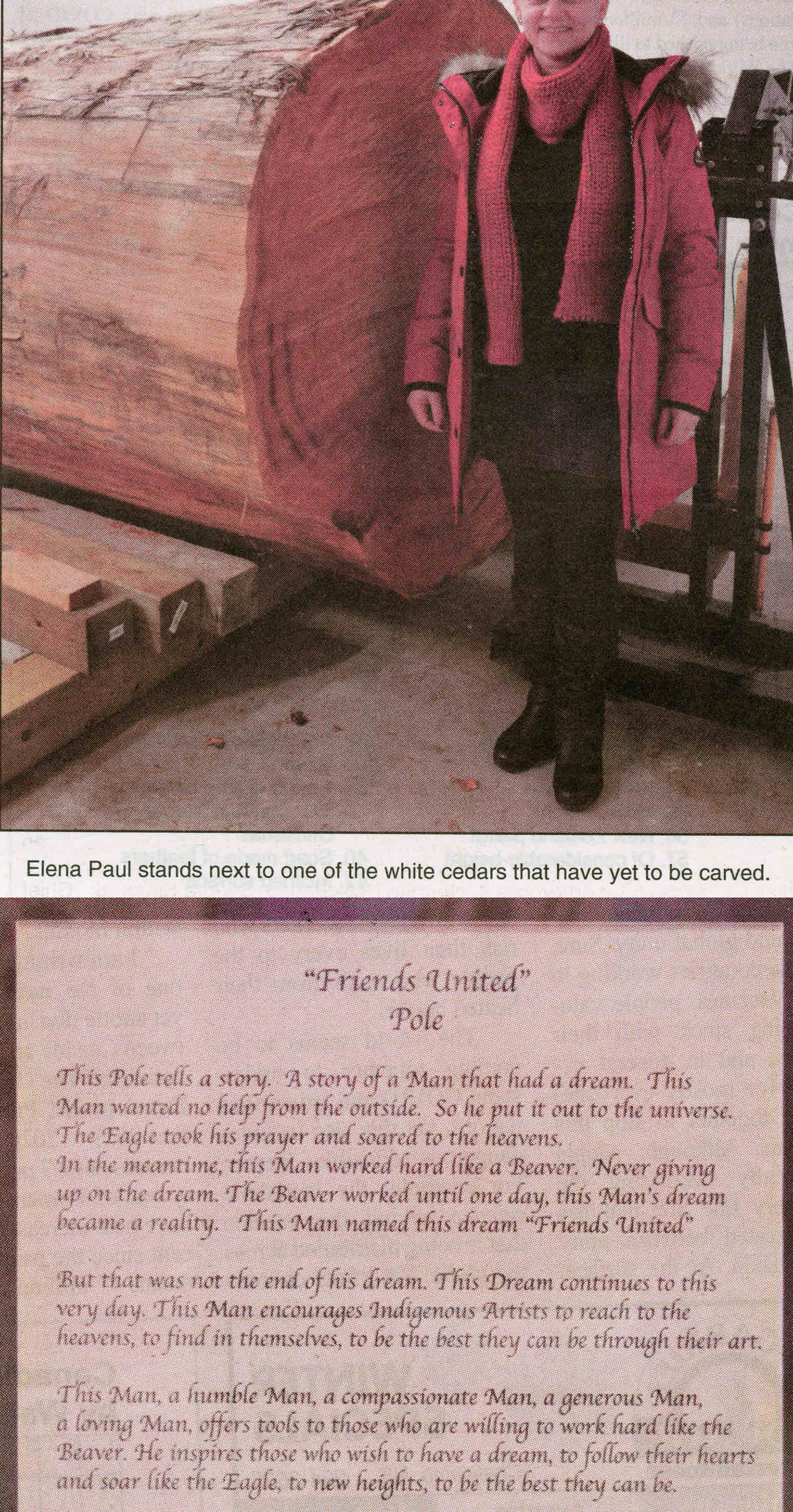
Rolf Bouman and his wife Elena Paul are dwarfed by the massive trees.



The outer ring is one year old and the centre ring 453 years. It has been through almost 5 centuries and witnessed many things on this continent. The three masks in symbolize animal spirits and the fourth one is missing to commemorate seven First Nations friends who passed away into the spirit world. 1 Jay Bell Redbird 2. Dozay Christmas 3. David Brooks 4. Norman Peter Paul 5. Sandra Simon 6. Chief Lawrence Paul 7. Mickey Sylliboy 8. Ben Sylliboy (Grand Chief) This centre is not only dedicated to their memory, but it also tells the stories of their works and lives. Let us remember them together. Let us be Friends United.



Gerry Sheena's carving style is traditionally Salish, informed by modern painting techniques and innovative use of colour and design.



Elena Paul stands next to one of the white cedars that have yet to be carved.

### "Friends United" Pole

This Pole tells a story. A story of a Man that had a dream. This Man wanted no help from the outside. So he put it out to the universe. The Eagle took his prayer and soared to the heavens. In the meantime, this Man worked hard like a Beaver. Never giving up on a dream, this Beaver worked until one day, this Man's dream became a reality. This Man named this dream "Friends United"

But that was not the end of his dream. This Dream continues to this very day. This Man encourages Indigenous Artists to reach to the heavens, to find in themselves, to be the best they can be through their art.

This Man, a humble Man, a compassionate Man, a generous Man, a loving Man, offers tools to those who are willing to work hard like the Beaver. He inspires those who wish to have a dream, to follow their hearts and soar like the Eagle, to new heights, to be the best they can be.

This Man's dream is also to encourage, any artist up to the challenge, to display their fine arts, at the "Friends United" centre for all to see. To educate people of this diverse world, that the indigenous have a place, a story, a passion and respectability to share and keep their tradition alive and to pass it on to future generations.

To continue educating ourselves and others, to be "Friends United"

I, Gerry Sheena, of the Upper Nicola Band, the Salish Nation, am honoured and feel blessed to have been invited to this beautiful place to share a small bit of the West Coast Traditions.

I was given the honour to carve this Totem Pole for display in one of the most beautiful display of art works.

I want to thank Rolf Bouman for this opportunity. I feel truly blessed to be a Friend of the Friends United Circle

Thank You

*Gerry Sheena*