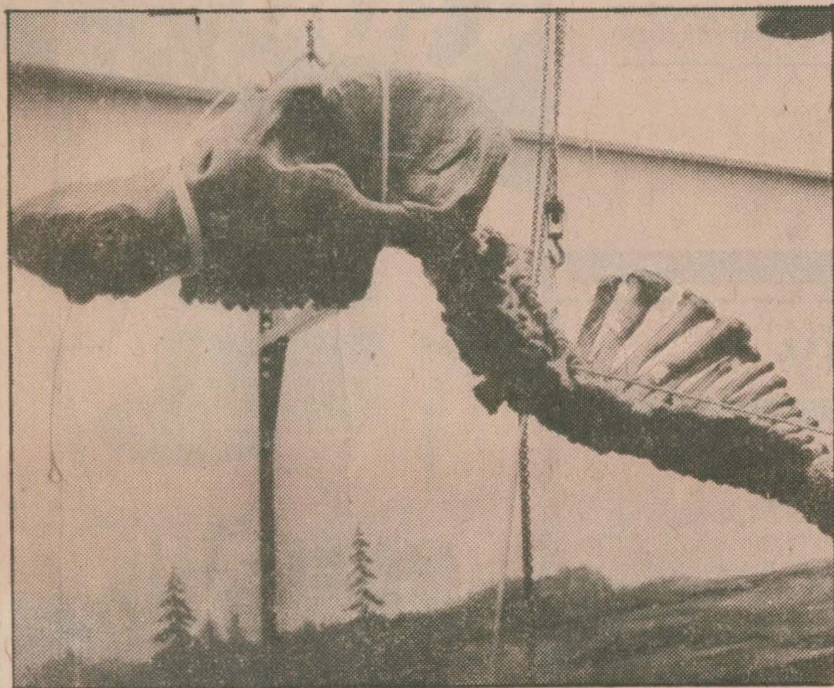


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OCC class pieces together mastodon skeleton found in county

No bones about it, this class is a puzzle

By B.A. MODRACK
Of The Oakland Press

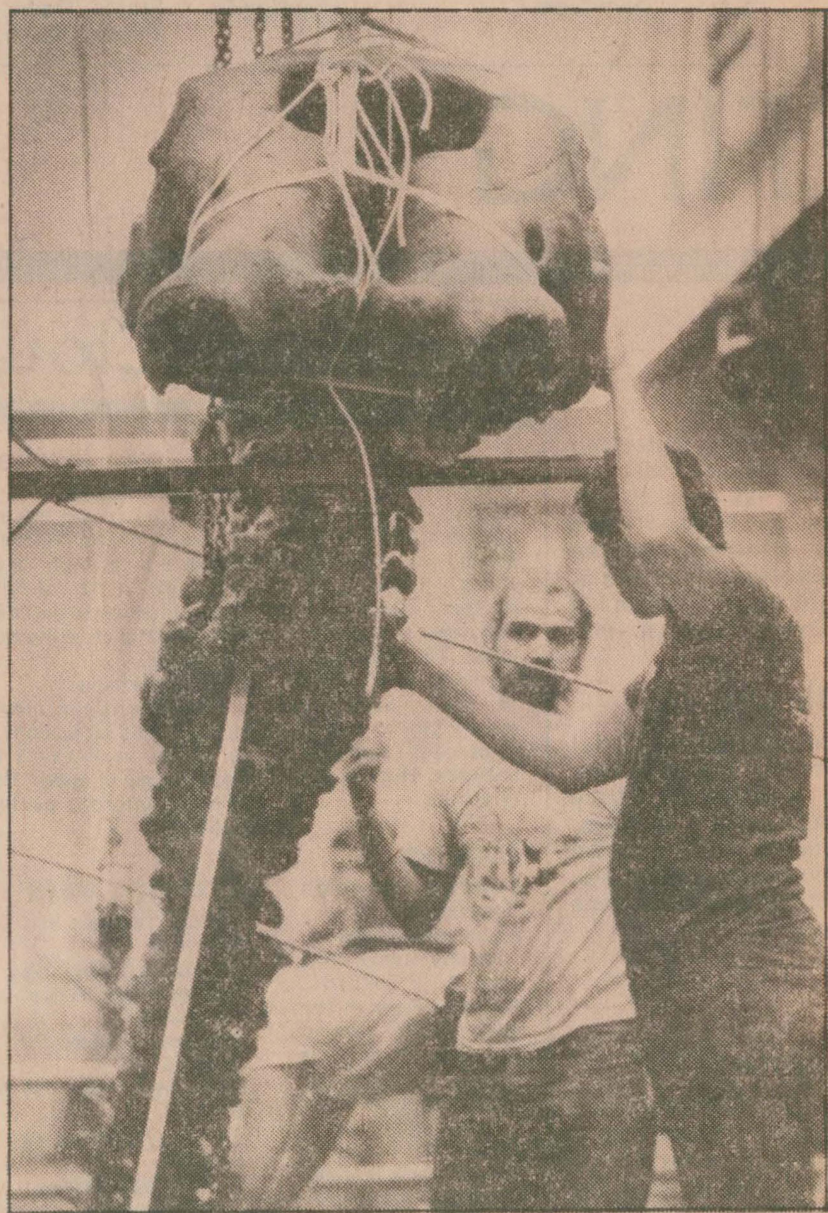
WATERFORD — Elmer has been reborn. Although he's definitely less lively than when he roamed the state ages ago, and maybe a little worse for wear, he's still an imposing figure for being 10,200 years old. Standing 12 feet high and 22

feet long, one of Michigan's only two mounted mastodon skeletons was pieced together Thursday at Oakland Community College's Highland Lake Campus.

The University of Michigan houses the other ancient relative of today's elephant.

Elmer's skeleton, so-named

(Continued on A-6)



The Oakland Press/Tim Thompson

Students work on aligning the head of 10,200-year-old Elmer

No bones about it, class is a puzzle

(Continued from A-1)

because of an Elmer's glue solution originally used to preserve it, is the culmination of a three-term geology class project called "Mounting a Mastodon," directed by Wayne State University doctoral candidate Jeheskel Shashani.

To "mount" a mastodon is to put the bones back together as they would have been when the animal was alive.

Mastodons roamed the state during the latter stages of the Ice Age, at a time when 8-foot-tall beavers were common and walruses swam in the waters of what are now the Great Lakes.

Leaf-eating mastodons frequently stumbled into bogs or swampy areas and sank, preserving their bones in the mud and muck, scientists say.

According to Shashani, OCC became Elmer's eventual home in March, 1968 when a college receptionist made an executive decision by accepting the

mastodon bones from the Groleau Construction company, which unearthed them while digging a basement near Cranberry Lake in White Lake Township.

The creature's huge skull and other bones were stored in college buildings until about two years ago, when Dr. Ned Brodbeck, OCC's provost, "recognized the value of it (the mounting), and allowed us to proceed," said physics professor and project catalyst Charles Nelson.

"I had to climb around in attics and everywhere looking for them," Shashani said. "They had forgotten where they were."

Standing on a scaffold, trying to connect a steel bar strung with vertebrae to a huge skull chained to the ceiling, Shashani praised his class for their dedication to the project.

"It was a community project," he said. "We learned how to do it together."

When students signed up for GSC 240 "Special Topics in Geology" in the fall of 1981, they soon found out they were in for more than the average fossil search.

The 50 students prepared the bones for mounting in such ways as drilling holes for metal rods to connect the parts, making "cartilage" out of floor polishing pads, and removing the Elmer's glue solution and reapplying another preservative called Gylstol.

Although all of the leg bones were found, many of the other bones were missing or incomplete.

A New Jersey firm was employed to cast them in plaster and fiberglass from the mounted model at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

"You have to be crazy to get into a class like this," said student Mary Ann Vaerten, laughing as she held pieces of a mastodon foot together while the

glue dried.

Luckily, she said, her husband is also a member of the class, in which the work became very consuming during the school year.

"We learned more about mastodons than we had ever expected," said Shashani.

From the bone shavings, Shashani was able to isolate proteins that had never before been isolated from mastodon fossils.

These proteins were able to prove in a new way the link between mastodons and today's species of elephant. Previous proof of that link had come from the teeth and the skeleton.

The official name for Elmer is the Groleau-White Lake Mastodon, named for the construction company that found it and the location.

Costing \$10,000, Elmer will be on permanent display for OCC students, and a public unveiling is slated for June 28.