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“Nothing grows well in the shade of a big tree.”
—Constantin Brancusi

Warriors on parade
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Walking with the warriors

Aberdeen Centre recreates Great Wall of China, Terracotta Army, bringing ancient China to life this summer inside a Richmond shopping mall



Sculptors with BC's Sandemons Sand Sculpture Company begin work on their Great Wall of China



Ten soldiers and two horses will also be on display at Richmond's Aberdeen Centre through Aug. 30

While visitors to Aberdeen Centre were somewhat startled to see 100 metric tons of sand dumped on the mall's doorstep this past weekend, there will be even more surprises in store at the Richmond shopping centre in the coming days.

Joey Kwan, Aberdeen Centre's promotion and public relations manager, believes a modern mall should be about more than just shopping and dining. According to Kwan, a shopping mall should be a destination, a community hub where people congregate to open their minds along with their wallets.

To that end, Kwan and her Aberdeen team are presenting one of the most unique exhibits ever staged at a Metro Vancouver shopping centre. Just watch you don't get sand in your shorts.

The Return of the First Emperor exhibit features a re-creation of two wonders of the world right in Aberdeen Centre's Central Atrium.

All that sand is currently being crafted into a 33-foot-by-16-foot replica of a section the Great Wall of China. On Tuesday, 10 warriors and two horses of China's famous Terracotta Army will

take positions alongside the immense sand sculpture.

Both wall and warriors were originally conceived by Qin Shi Huang, China's first self-imposed emperor who ruled with an iron fist some 2200 years ago. So nasty was the fellow, he reportedly sealed tens of thousands of artisans and labourers in to the underground necropolis he created as his afterlife empire, lest they reveal the location of his eerie mausoleum.

"Every year Aberdeen Centre will organize an educational exhibit for families and the kids during the summertime," explains Kwan.

"Two years ago we put on a Jurassic display with animatronic dinosaurs that roared and moved and were 29 feet tall and 40 feet long. Last year, we set up an organic farm inside the mall, including a rice paddy field to give people the chance to know how their rice is grown."

This year's exhibit, says Kwan, expands on Aberdeen's billing as a "unique fusion of East meets West" and will be on display from July 24 through August 30.

The mall's Great Wall should be completed July 20, the day before the warriors arrive on a flat-bed truck from Ontario's Royal Exhibitions.

The sand wall is being created by British Columbia's own David Billings, and his team of sculptors from Sandemons Sand Sculpture Company.

So incredible is the feat, National Geographic television is on hand to record the process for a new TV series.

"That much sand is very difficult to bring into a mall," admits Kwan, who oversaw the dump trucks and bobcats that hauled the stuff in from

the mall's Hazelbridge Way entrance.

"We had to close the roads, it's been a bit harsh."

The Terracotta Army was perhaps Emperor Qin Shi Huang's most famous and ambitious initiative. He had such an immense fear of death, he created an underground kingdom to help him rule in the Great Beyond.

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The Great Wall of China extends 8851.8 kilometres in China

To date, archaeologists in China's Lingtong County have unearthed some 8,000 soldiers, 130 chariots with 520 horses and 150 cavalry horses. Some 720,000 workers were mobilized for the

ancient project, which took 38 years to complete. After a halt on excavation for more than 20 years, the third large-scale excavation of Pit 1 (the largest of the three archaeological pits) began in earnest again on June 13.

Kwan says commanding generals, officers, archers, cavalrymen and horses of the Terracotta Army will be visiting Richmond this summer.

"We will be showing the warriors and the sand sculpture and all of

the achievements of Qin Shi Huang," says Kwan. "As well as art, costumes and calligraphy and the weapons of that time."

Kwan says Qin was a fascinating man.

"He built the Great Wall of China to protect the territory he ruled," she says. "The coins we were using until the Ching Dynasty, the circles with the square in the middle, that was created by him."

Kwan says the Return of the First Emperor will be one of B.C.'s best photo ops this summer.

"The whole Central Atrium will be turned around to the ancient times in China, 210 BC," she says. "It should be interesting for the kids when they don't have much to do in the summertime."

CHINA'S TERRACOTTA ARMY

- The Terracotta Army was discovered in eastern suburbs of Xi'an, Shaanxi Province by local farmers drilling a water well 1.5 miles east of Lishan mountain in 1974.
- In addition to the warriors, an entire man-made necropolis for the emperor, who was 13 when construction began, has been excavated.
- According to historian Sima Qian (145-90 BCE), The First Emperor was buried with palaces, scenic towers, officials, valuable utensils and wonderful objects, with 100 rivers fashioned in mercury.
- Recent scientific work at the site has shown high levels of mercury in the soil on and around Mount Lishan, appearing to add credence to the writing of ancient historian
- The tomb of Shi Huang Di is near an earthen pyramid 76 meters tall and nearly 350 square meters. It remains unopened, in the hope that it will remain intact. Only a portion of the site is presently excavated.
- Studies show that eight face moulds were most likely used for the warriors, and then clay was added to provide individual facial features
- Upon completion, the terracotta figures were placed in the pits in precise military formation according to rank and duty.
- The original weapons were stolen by robbers shortly after the creation of the army and the coloring has faded greatly.

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