

A Sudbury icon celebrates 50 years



Big Nickel creator Ted Szilva poses with his creation. Photo by Heidi Ulrichsen.

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Big Nickel creator has written book about monument

By: Heidi Ulrichsen - Sudbury Northern Life

Fifty years ago, in a contest for ideas to commemorate Canada's centennial, Ted Szilva came up with the idea to create a giant nickel monument.

He didn't win the contest, but went on to build what became known as the Big Nickel anyway.

The monument is based on the 1951 nickel, as that year was the 200th anniversary of the isolation of nickel as a mineral.

“I thought it was a fitting piece to portray the wealth of Sudbury,” Szilva said.

He raised the \$35,000 it cost to build the structure by selling miniature medallion versions of the monument. Today it would cost more than \$250,000 to build the structure.

Szilva built the Big Nickel Mine — a miniature mine located on the same site as the nickel monument — the following year, in 1965, as a training facility for Cambrian College students.

The [Big Nickel's 50th anniversary](#) will be officially marked July 22, and Szilva is celebrating in his own way. He's written a book about the monument's creation which will be released in May.

Szilva said he's “elated” his creation is still a must-see for visitors to Sudbury.

“I'm very much happy it's still here,” he said.

Dynamic Earth — the science centre located alongside the Big Nickel monument — is also planning a number of events to celebrate the anniversary.

A large community party featuring live entertainment and fireworks will be held on the site July 22.

In the days leading up to the anniversary, Dynamic Earth will also attempt to break a Guinness World Record for the largest mosaic.

The mosaic will be a portrait of the Big Nickel using — fittingly — nickels and dimes.

Also fitting in with this year's “nickel” theme, Dynamic Earth, which opens for the season March 1, has also launched an exhibit called “In the Money.”

The exhibit, developed in conjunction with the National Currency Museum and the Nickel Belt Coin Club, explores the science and history of currency.

It features, among other things, a collection of old nickels, bean-bag chairs made of shredded paper money and information about how the new polymer bills prevent counterfeiting.

Dynamic Earth senior manager Julie Moskaylk said she thinks it's “pretty amazing” the Big Nickel is now 50 years old.

“It's a Canadian iconic brand,” she said.

“You think of Sudbury, and most people think of the Big Nickel, amongst many other things. The Big Nickel is one of the top 10 roadside Canadian attractions. It's great that it's still here 50 years later, and looking beautiful.”

For a full listing of the 50th anniversary events, visit dynamicearth.ca/50.

Big Nickel fast facts:

- The Big Nickel is the largest coin in the world.
- It was constructed in 1964.
- It is an identical, enlarged replica of the 1951 Canadian nickel.
- Heads is King George VI, Canada's monarch in 1951.
- Tails is a stylized nickel refinery with one large stack.
- The Big Nickel weighs close to 13,000 kilograms (approximately 13 tons).
- It is about 64,607,747 times the size of a Canadian nickel.