

It's funny and free, too

Start your weekend on a comedy note with “Madagascar.” It’s the free family movie at 10 a.m. at Century 9 in Hutchinson.

B2



Measuring for safety

Hutchinson Jaycees will be on hand to measure for helmets and provide safety checks Saturday at the annual Bike and Blade Bonanza at Rotary Park in Hutchinson.

B2



EXTRA! MIDWEEK

A&E CALENDAR/B2    TRIBUTES/B4    CLASSIFIEDS/B6

Sculpting from Experience



John Travis studies his aluminum helmet sculpture, “Culmination.” The 10-pound work of art took 120 hours to complete. The design is based on the helmet he wore as a firefighter in Evans, Colorado.



John Travis uses an electric grinder to achieve a mirror-like finish to the shield on his aluminum helmet sculpture.



John Travis uses a welding torch to meld two pieces of metal for his sculpture, “Culmination.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF RIDGEWATER COLLEGE

John Travis combined life skills with artistic vision to create his award-winning sculpture, ‘Culmination’

BY KAY JOHNSON  
johnson@hutchinsonleader.com

John Travis is in it to win it. Come June 24-28, you’ll find the 41-year-old Hutchinson resident in Louisville, Kentucky, competing in the SkillsUSA Championship. The national competition draws more than 6,500 outstanding career and technical education students — all state contest winners — who will compete hands-on in 103 different trade, technical and leadership fields. Travis, a welding instructor at Ridgewater College and a firefighter for the Hutchinson Fire Department, has brought his experience and skills together to create his entry, “Culmination,” a welded, aluminum sculpture of a firefighter helmet. He chose the title because it signifies the culmination of a body of work that has taken him 20 years to complete. “I always had a vision for it,” he said. Travis started working on the design in January, documenting the process every step of the way. In the end, it took a total of 120 hours to complete. “I wanted it for the state competition (in April) and I wanted to take my time and not have to rush it,” he said. Travis chose aluminum as the metal for the sculpture because it had the look he was going for. It could be polished and he didn’t want to have to worry about it rusting. No paint or powder coatings were allowed, so to achieve the look he wanted, Travis relied on different finishes achieved through techniques such as polishing and sandblasting. “I did whatever I could to add good finishing touches without overdoing it,” he said. He added contrast by choosing copper wire for the helmet strap, which he braided and ran through a roller to flatten it. The shield bears the number 343, which is in honor and remembrance of the number of firefighters who died on Sept. 11, 2001. Travis entered “Culmination” in the SkillsUSA state contest in April. He won in the category of welded sculpture and advanced to the national competition next month.

“My parents were in a fiery explosion of an oxy-acetylene cutting torch and tanks on our farm. My stepfather was killed, and my mother received third-degree burns over 40 percent of her body.”

**John Travis, Hutchinson firefighter and sculptor**

“I’m excited to compete with people across the country,” he said. “Everyone there has the ability to join metals. It’s their vision that sets them apart.” Looking back at the process, Travis said he wouldn’t change a thing. “It matched the vision,” he said. “I’m my biggest self critic. It was hard to leave it alone. I had to verbally, outloud tell myself to leave it.” That said, he enjoyed the creative experience. “It was so fun,” he said. “Iloved it. I enjoyed every single second of it. I’d do it again.” Travis is hoping there are more sculptures in his future. “It’s certainly my hope that people will see it and want me to make one for them,” he said. “My end goal is if you love what you do, you never work a day in your life. It’s my passion.”

**ROCKY MOUNTAIN HOME**

Travis was born and raised on a farm in Colorado. He was 21, with no clear sense of direction for his life or career, when a terrible accident changed everything. “My parents were in a fiery explosion of an oxy-acetylene cutting torch and tanks on our farm,” he said. “My stepfather was killed, and my mother received third-degree burns over 40 percent of her body.” During his mother’s recovery, which took months of hospitalization, Travis had to learn to grieve and cope with his new circumstances. He also discovered he had the desire to help people in need. As he worked through his feelings, his family faced another tragedy. His cousin’s 5-year-old son died in a house fire. Later that year, it was Sept. 11, 2001, when four coordinated terrorist attacks took place against the United States. “I think everyone felt that huge sense of fear and loss,” he said. “It took awhile to pick up the pieces.” For Travis, it meant doing something with all that experience. He started school for emergency medicine and joined the fire department in Evans, Colorado. “I had to gain as much knowledge of fire, its

Travis to B5 ➤

“Culmination” by John Travis