



Rod Cupp held up one of his many animals he's worked on at his home-based business in Blackhawk. —Ron Wolf photo

## District man enjoys taxidermy business

By Ron Wolf  
Staff writer

When I arrived at the Blackhawk area abode of local taxidermist Rod Cupp yesterday, I expected to experience unpleasant odours that only dead animals and the like can produce.

Luckily for me, it was anything but that. I found the visit to be an interesting and an odour-free one.

Cupp, who was born in Fort Frances, runs a home-based taxidermy shop in Blackhawk, where he lives with his wife.

He said he doesn't experience too many financial difficulties.

"I don't have much of an overhead, I work in my basement," he remarked as he worked on a project known as "fleshing the cape" (when all the meat and membrane is removed from the deer's skin).

"The rich guys have a machine. I have a knife," he joked.

What takes a machine to do in 20 minutes, it takes Cupp four hours with a knife.

Although Cupp said he really doesn't run into too many glitches, he does admit there are some. The biggest problem is when people bring in rotten capes.

(The cape is from the deer's head to the lower chest area. A good example of a cape can be seen on a Canadian quarter.)

Cupp's talents are used on most everything that walks on four legs in the region. "Just about everything but birds and fish," he noted, adding his abilities are better used on animals with hair or fur.

It started out as a hobby some 28 years ago, but turned into a business when a taxidermist botched up a job.

"The first bear I shot was with my bow. I took it [the bear] to a taxidermist and he ruined it on me," Cupp recalled.

"I said that's enough of that.

"We started to cover the costs of the mounts and went from there," he added. "It [the business] kept getting bigger and bigger."

Cupp's knowledge of deer is extensive as he explained the compelling parts.

The deer's antlers, for instance, start out when their in velvet. It's all blood vessels and very prone to hits and bumps (they could bleed to death if they are ruptured).

Later the antlers are turned to bone, said Cupp.

Besides the taxidermist business, Cupp also runs bear hunts. "We cater to the guys, like myself, not too rich and our prices are low," he noted.

Cupp doesn't run into any real competition, saying most of his clients are from West Virginia, Kansas, New Mexico, and California.

People are welcome to drop by Cupp's home business to utilize his talents.

He said he's around his place more nowadays because deer hunting season just opened Saturday in the west end of the district, and people call him wanting their deer to be worked on.

"Fellows will drop in just to see what's going on," he added.

Cupp said he's busy this year because he has three or four black bears to fully mount.

It will take him 30 hours to fully mount a black bear and just 12 hours to mount a deer. He does stress the process can't be done

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Rod Cupp worked on "fleshing the cape" at his home-based taxidermy business in Blackhawk yesterday morning.



This menacing feline is one of Rod Cupp's works. —Ron Wolf photos

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at once.  
"The work must be done in stages. Ordering the forms, eyes, sewing, and gluing," he explained.  
Cupp's other talents include refurbishing rugs like bear skins.  
He had to think for a moment about the strangest animals to work on. "Raccoons are different," he eventually said. "Timber wolves—they stink."  
The difference between hunting

game and protecting them depends on where you live.  
"If you talk to people in your section [southern Ontario], they want to protect them [the animals]," noted Cupp. "You talk to the farmers around here, they're killing the calves."  
Wolves prey on farm animals.  
Cupp said a hunter used to be able to kill wolves on a small hunting licence up to two years ago. Now, you need a special licence

and you only can kill two a year.  
"They [wolves] are hard on white-tail deer, young fawns, and farmers' calves. They're a threat to people around here," he warned.  
Cupp added he enjoys quizzing visitors on which parts of the country they come from.  
"Most visitors have little idea what it's like in this part of the country," he noted.