

The City Museum's new No. 2 pencil is No. 1 - N.Y. health food store manager and friends built the \$20,000 pencil as a birthday gift. Now, through his largess, it'll draw a lot of attention in St. Louis.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO) - January 29, 2008

- Author/Byline: Diane Toroian Keaggy ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH
- Edition: Third Edition
- Section: Metro
- Page: C3

The 250-pound eraser is real rubber. The lead is 4,000 pounds of Pennsylvania graphite. The exterior matches the yellow hue of a classic No. 2.

Guinness World Record maker and breaker Ashrita Furman considered every detail when he built the world's largest pencil - except, perhaps, how to sharpen it.

"We thought about making the world's largest pencil sharpener, but we ran out of money," Furman said.

Furman escorted his 22,000-pound, 76-foot-long pencil to its new home at the City Museum in St. Louis on Monday. Furman cut the pencil in two for the trip from Queens, New York; City Museum artisans will reattach the sections soon.

City Museum founder Bob Cassilly isn't sure when or where the pencil will go on display. Maybe he will suspend it among the airplanes and fire trucks that are part of the museum's outdoor jungle gym, Monstrocity. Or perhaps it will join another museum superlative: the world's largest pair of underpants.

"It's hard to leave it, but it will bring a lot of joy to the people here," Furman said. "This place seems like the perfect fit."

Furman, a 53-year-old health food store manager, and some 50 friends built the \$20,000 pencil in August as a birthday gift to their now deceased meditation instructor Sri Chinmoy. Take that pencil manufacturer Faber-Castell; it boasts a 65-foot pencil outside of its Malaysia headquarters.

"They said it took them 7,000 man hours to build their pencil, but we were able to get ours done in about three weeks," Furman said.

This was not the first time Chinmoy's followers celebrated his birthday with a world record. Once they served him a cake studded with 27,000 candles (Chinmoy was only 74). Another year, they sculpted a 20-foot birthday cake from popcorn and corn syrup. (No one took a slice.)

"Meditation has given me the inner strength to do these improbable things," Furman said. "True, a lot of what I do is crazy, but it gives me a chance to spread the message of meditation."

Furman claims he has set 177 Guinness Records in his lifetime and currently holds 72 records, one of which is setting the world record for world records. He has juggled underwater for 48 minutes, caught 77 grapes in his mouth in one minute and completed 434 games of hopscotch in 24 hours. Many of his challenges involve the pogo stick - longest continuous distance (23 miles), fastest mile (12 minutes, 16 seconds), longest underwater pogo stick jumping (1,680 feet) and fastest time up Toronto's CN Tower (1,899 steps in 57 minutes, 51 seconds). Curiously, Furman does not hold the world record for knee replacements. (Yet.)

"I love jumping," Furman said. "I have set records for jumping jacks, hopping, hopscotch. My teacher taught me to be childlike and joyful and that is what jumping is to me. I'm just a big kid."

SOME OF FURMAN'S WORLD RECORDS

Longest continuous somersault: 12 miles, 390 yards

Fastest time skipping a marathon: Five hours, 55 minutes

Most sit-ups with an abdominal frame in one hour: 9,628

Longest continuous time spinning a top: Seven hours, one minute, 14 seconds

Most apple bobs in a minute: 32

Most Jell-O consumed with chopsticks in one minute: 16 ounces

Visit www.Ashrita.com/records to see a complete list of Furman's currently held records.

Talk

STLtoday.com/current

A giant pencil - cool idea or waste of time? Talk about it in Current Affairs.

- **Caption:** PHOTOPHOTO - Furman PHOTO - Daniel Heggarty, a staff member of the City Museum, stands atop the world's largest pencil as it was prepared for unloading Monday morning. Ashrita Furman created the 76-foot-long pencil as a birthday gift for his meditation teacher. Story | C3 Robert Cohen | Post-Dispatch (C1 refer photo.)
- *Index terms:* LOCAL;ATTRACTION;CITY MUSEUM;GIFT;UNUSUAL;PENCIL;SIZE;Ashrita Furman;MULTIPLE;RECORD;LIST;URL
- *Record:* 1001173204
- *Copyright:* Copyright (c) 2008 St. Louis Post-Dispatch