



## JURASSIC PARKS

**THIS SUMMER.** Pittsburgh is going prehistoric with DinoMite Days. Science meets artistic expression as the city-wide public display of art features more than 100 scientifically accurate dinosaur replicas painted by national and regional artists. Roam the streets, parks, plazas, or hillsides of the city this summer, and you just might stumble across a festive T. Rex or a splashy Stegosaurus.

The imaginatively decorated dinosaurs will adorn Pittsburgh's landscape through September, when they will then be auctioned for charity (proceeds will go to local charitable organizations and will help fund the renovation of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History's Dinosaur Hall). DinoMite Days is coordinated by the Museum of Natural History, which is renowned for its prehistoric fossil collection. To learn more about the participating artists or to track down a dinosaur in the city, visit [dinomitedays.org](http://dinomitedays.org).

—Callie Young  
Stubler



# CHARMED, I'M SURE

Writer MELBA NEWSOME gets squirmy in a North Carolina SERPENTARIUM run by a man who brings new meaning to the term "love bite."

FROM THE OUTSIDE, Wilmington's newest attraction blends in with everything else in the city's historic district. But step inside and it's a jungle. At the Cape Fear Serpentarium, you'll find more than 200 of the city's most carefully watched residents. That's how many varieties of reptiles are housed in the 6,000-square-foot museum.

A stroll through the Serpentarium introduces you to some of the world's rarest reptiles, including 15 species of vipers and 13 species of cobras. Each occupies its own piece of natural habitat in display cases built by movie-set designers. Meet Sheena, a 23-foot-long, 250-pound reticulated python; Baron Samedi, a 15-foot king cobra; and a host of black mambas, gaboon vipers, and tropical rattlers.

When the Serpentarium opened Labor Day 2002, no one was more thrilled than its founder and director, Dean Ripa, who finally had a site big enough for his collection. Ripa has either bred or caught the vast majority of the reptiles himself, a passion that began when he had his first encounter with a harmless corn snake at age four.

The Wilmington native has spent much of his adult life trekking through remote areas of

far-flung countries. He collected snakes to fund his travels and traveled in order to collect snakes to sell to zoos, research institutions, and private collectors around the world. In his pursuits, Ripa has survived coups, malaria, dysentery, skin lesions, and too many other infections to name. And let's not forget about his 10 venomous snake bites, four of them from bushmasters.

"I'm the most bushmaster-bitten guy alive," he says, in a tone that conveys something between pride and insanity.

"The bushmaster is very venomous, and 80 percent of the people bitten have died. I've been bitten four times."

Although Ripa's current routine lacks the danger and exoticism of his Indiana Jones adventures, he is comfortably settled in his apartment above the Serpentarium. His wanderlust hasn't disappeared, however. "It's still in my blood," he says, pun intended. ★

### THE TICKET

Visit the Cape Fear Serpentarium at 20 Orange St. in Wilmington, North Carolina; 910/762-1669.

MELBA NEWSOME is a freelance writer whose work has been published in *Family Circle*, *Essence*, and *Vibe*.