

HISTORY

Looking toward the sky

*Helios Trail art is symbolic for
College of Engineering*

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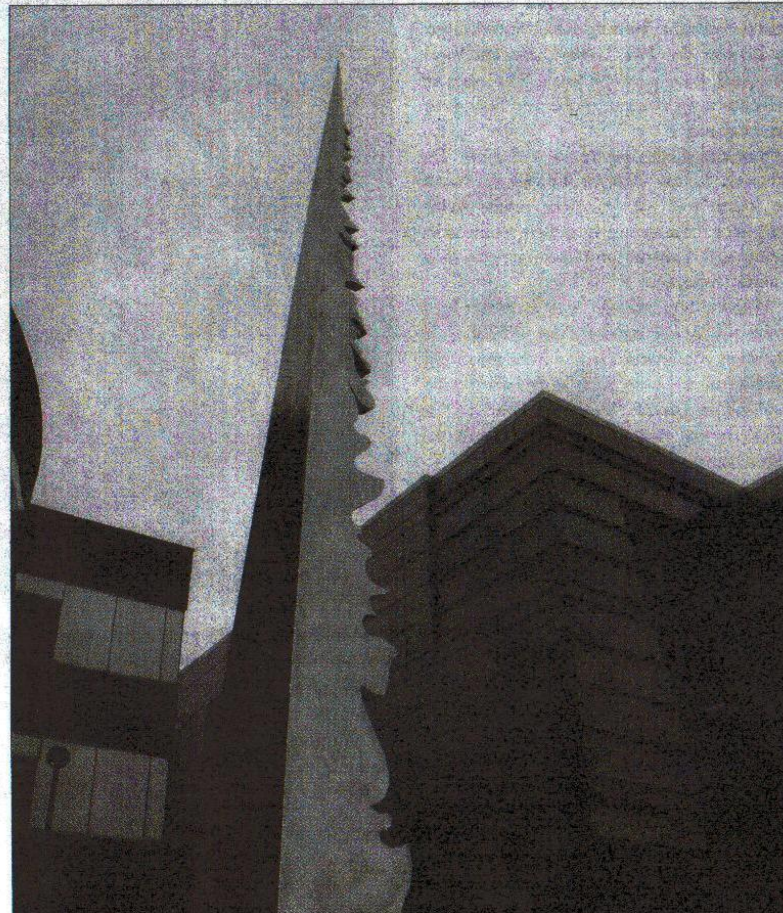
"I've never even thought about it. I don't understand why it should be right here," Wayne State University student Rich Evans said as he stood in the sharp autumn wind and stared at the 40-foot-tall stainless steel spike outside of the College of Engineering.

For most, the Helios Trail sculpture is just another obscure piece of art. But to the College of Engineering, it is the symbol that represents students' efforts to reach the top.

"We felt like that was quite fitting for the college," said Fred Beaufait, the dean of engineering from 1986 to 1996 whose idea it was for the sculpture. "Not only its beauty, but the kind of story that it told."

Helios Trail leaps from its base along Warren Avenue where it slants and points with its sharp tip toward the sky. The silver swirls along its surface glint. Its curved, serrated edge gives the impression that it's on fire. From afar, it's dwarfed by the neighboring buildings. But up close, its presence is massive.

The College of Engineering began its search for a sculpture in 1988. Beaufait said he wanted the sculpture to be an addition to the college, especially since he saw engineering as related to art. His other objective was to have a unique logo.



"Wayne Engineer," Helios Trail was officially unveiled Sept. 22, 1989 to a crowd of "engineering faculty, alumni, students and those curious on-lookers that just happened to walk by despite inclement weather."

There were some slight malfunctions in the unveiling. Beaufait said a rope was attached to the large canvas, covering the sculpture so that when it was pulled the entire thing would unzip.

"As one might expect, Murphy was at work and the rope got hung up, and we had a heck of a time getting the canvas off of the sculpture to unveil it," he said.

From its unveiling more than two decades ago, the Helios Trail sculpture is still the College of Engineering's symbol. Public Affairs Officer David Reich said its name is used in the department's newsletter, the "Spirit of Helios."

"It's included in our logo ... it's on all printed literature coming from the college," he said.

In 2007, Helios Trail was separated from its base, lifted by a crane and put into storage during construction on the neighboring Marvin I. Danto Engineering Development Center. Since the center's completion in 2009, Helios Trail stands in its new location on Warren Avenue near the conjunction between the old and new buildings.

"I think it's one of the more powerful sculptures around campus," Reich said. "I think the new location makes it even more dynamic, especially on a very sunny day with a blue sky against that steel background. It's