

"It's important to be able to have a brand," he said. "A logo, an identifier, so that when people see it they know what it is, who it's for and what it's about."

Beaufait and others in the College of Engineering held a national competition to attract interested artists. A committee of faculty, alumni and artists was set up and ads were sent to galleries and put in magazines.

"I forget how many, but we had quite a number of proposals," Beaufait said. "I think it was something like 20 or more."

Bruce White, then a professor at the Northern Illinois School of Art, was one of four finalists who were asked to make miniature models of their proposed sculptures. White's Helios Trail model was displayed with the others at the college for people to see.

When White first heard of the competition, he already had experience with large sculptures. He said he liked the idea of rising – the College of Engineering rising in the scope of new technology.

White said he did hundreds of freehand sketches with a special focus on the edge, where he tried to capture the feeling of energy moving and exploding upward.

"It all just fit together," he said. "The one edge is straight and the other edge has that kind of exciting contour on it. So that's the



Tyler D. Griffis / The South End

Helios Trail, located near the corner of Warren Avenue and Anthony Wayne Drive, made its debut in 1989 following a national competition to select a sculpture.

way I put them together – the stability of one edge and the excitement of the other."

Beaufait said the committee picked Helios Trail as the winner because of its unison with the spirit of the College of Engineering and its function as a logo.

"Some of the other proposals just weren't quite as adoptive for a logo," he said. "I remember one of them was sort of a piece of sculpture suspended between the buildings off of cables, and one of them was sort of like the Stonehenge monument all around in a circle.

"They just didn't lend themselves to one of the criteria that we wanted, and that was to be able to get a nice logo out of it."

White worked on the sculpture for more

than six months in his studio in DeKalb, Illinois. "There's so much equipment you need to do it," he said. "It's like running a little factory."

White and his assistant made large-scale copies of the drawings and laid them on the floor in his studio to draw patterns, which they used to create the stainless-steel frame and panels. White said he used grinders, cutting tools and polishers to create the contoured and hollow structure.

"It would be like an airplane structure inside it," he said. "It diminishes in size as it goes upward just as an airplane wing diminishes in size."

According to an article printed in the defunct engineering student magazine

a blue sky against that steel background. It's pretty awesome."

White said he's seen pictures of his sculpture's new location.

"I like the design of the building," he said. "It (the sculpture) gets a little dwarfed by the new building. But when you pass by, I'm guessing it looks larger because of the perspective."

To White, public art is unique because the audience is unknown and often not interested in art.

"If I'm having a gallery show, anybody can go to it that wants to, and if they're offended they can walk out," he said. "But with me, I have to make something that people will be looking at for many, many years in public."

He said people look at public art with preconceived notions, which makes it difficult for them to enjoy it.

"Just like finding a flower," White said. "You don't have to know the name of the flower when you see it to enjoy it."

The sculpture continues to raise mixed reactions from passers-by today. Big, bulky, abstract, modern and weird are a few.

But after careful observation, some begin to see its dynamic qualities. Still staring at the sculpture, Evans paused to think it over and said: "It changes depending on which way you're looking at it."