

A giant 15-foot-high helix made from the anchor chain of an 1866 schooner rises majestically on an outdoor alcove at the new Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre in Southampton.



This unique double-helix sculpture is the brainchild of Mike Sterling of Southampton, one of many volunteers from the Southampton Propeller Club who value and honour the marine heritage along the Lake Huron and Georgian Bay coasts.

The chain was originally salvaged along the lakeshore near MacGregor Point. It came from the 120-foot schooner, AZOV, which sprang a leak on October 12, 1911. The captain and crew abandoned ship and the schooner drifted across lake Huron as a ghost ship, finally coming aground at MacGregor Point.

The sculpture has two helical strands winding 270 degrees from base to top and measuring 19 feet each. The links of the chain are huge, each measuring seven inches long by five inches wide with a girth of 1.5 inches. Total weight of the chain is 800 pounds.

“The shape is beautiful and can be seen for just that, without knowing the background or the inner meaning,” says Sterling, who, along with Giles Roy, worked on a full-scale wood model to establish the proper sight lines. To both men, the inner meaning of the sculpture is a fitting symbol of everything they value about Bruce County life.

The creative beginning of the anchor chain helix has its roots firmly embedded in Sterling’s life as a mathematician, studying shapes and the mathematics of producing them. He reaches his third floor study in Southampton by climbing a helical staircase. At the top, pictures of renowned scientists Albert Einstein and Dr. James D. Watson are linked with a small length of chain to depict the connection between these two men and their epic findings.

Sterling and Giles believe the “inner meaning” of the AZOV helix is many things.

It’s a symbol of renewal through all of Bruce County as well as the newly expanded and enriched museum. It also depicts “our tight connection with Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, which are at the core of our love for the area.”

“An anchor chain is on the seam of safety and danger, and helps us visualize our ancestors who braved the harsh waters and environment. The chain of life was sometimes held together by a blacksmith’s art.”

An analysis revealed the chain itself was formed hot and was probably “drop forged”. For many years, the chain sat unused at the museum and was rediscovered during the move from the old museum in early 2004.

