

# Taunton Daily Gazette

Serving Taunton, Raynham, Dighton, Berkley, Rehoboth and surrounding communities

Monday, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011 - A Commitment to the Community since 1848 - Volume 328, Number 46, 75c

## FISH

# Homage to cod at Rock Museum

## Carving replicates the State House's 1784 Sacred Cod

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**BERKLEY** — The Sacred Cod is now a fixture of the Dighton Rock Museum.

Museum officials and the commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) presented the wooden sculpture to dozens of guests during a dedication ceremony held on Sunday. The Spanish cedar carving — a 1-yard-long replica of the Sacred Cod held at the State House — now hangs at the center of the museum, located

See SACRED COD, Page A5

## SACRED COD

Continued from Page A1

in Berkley.

Emphasizing the Portuguese phrase that surrounds the cod — often referred to as “fiel amigo,” or faithful friend — DCR Commissioner Edward M. Lambert Jr. said the carving is another contribution to an institution that was made possible by community members who work together for a common cause.

“This symbol here today that we celebrate is not only about the maritime history this museum is about, it is about friendship,” Lambert said. “We see great symbols around us of exploration but we also realize that there are true friends that make it happen.”

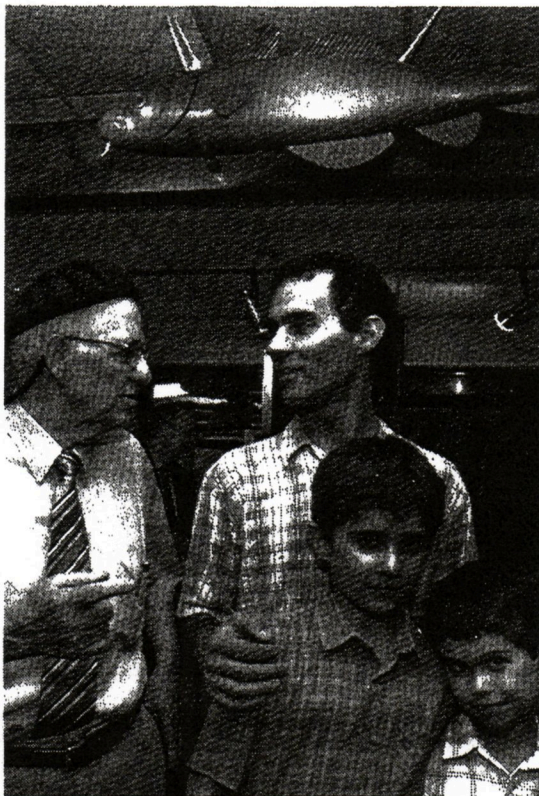
The Dighton Rock Museum's version of the Sacred Cod was inspired by the Sacred Cod displayed in the Massachusetts House of Representatives since the early 1700s. The Sacred Cod was destroyed twice before the current version was carved in 1784 by Mass. Rep. John Rowe, who called it an homage to the fish that saturated the seas surrounding New England and sustained early European settlers in the region.

The Sacred Cod featured at the Dighton Rock Museum was donated by the Academy of Codfish of New England, which formed in 2000 to celebrate Portuguese culture and to promote the health benefits of eating cod.

### The significance of cod

Antonio Teixeira is the current president of the Academy of Codfish of New England, which has 252 members. Teixeira said it is important for New Englanders to realize the significance of cod.

“The people of both sides



TAUNTON GAZETTE PHOTO BY MIKE GAY  
Manuel Luciano da Silva, left, talks with Jose Silva, creator of the Sacred Cod, and his sons Jason and Justin.

of the Atlantic for more than 500 years have eaten literally tons of codfish, but the only place in the world that paid homage to the marvelous codfish was the House of Representatives in Boston,” Teixeira said. “From now on, this maritime museum of Dighton Rock will be the second place in the world to display a Sacred Cod.”

“The academy has been very much about the business of creating friends, talking about Portuguese history and delivering books to schools,” Teixeira said. “We can’t be a people that celebrates quality of life if you don’t also recognize from whence we came. In that

spirit, the academy brought the Sacred Cod here today.”

### Creating the Sacred Cod

The Sacred Cod replica was carved by Jose Silva, who operates the Westport-based Silva Woodwork. Silva, who focuses mostly on kitchen work, said carving the Sacred Cod was a job of special significance to him because of its staying power.

“It’s nice to think that my kids can come here with my grandchildren to see this someday,” said Silva, who worked on the carving for several months. “Most of my work doesn’t last more than 50 years. Every job is a challenge. I’m very happy with it.”

### Better than Boston’s

After the dedication, the guests ate hot dogs and “cod cakes,” like crab cakes but filled with cod.

Manuel Luciano da Silva, president of the Friends of Dighton Rock Museum and founder of the Academy of Codfish of New England, joked that politicians on Beacon Hill may become envious of the Sacred Cod at Dighton Rock.

“I will not tell anybody, but I’ll tell you a secret,” said da Silva, who has contributed to the Dighton Rock Museum for more than six decades. “This codfish that is here is much more beautiful than the one in Boston. Maybe when the representatives come here they will come here and steal it from us. Over our dead body. Okay?”

Da Silva also issued a challenge to Gov. Deval Patrick or any others that may become governor. Da Silva said no governor since 1960 has “had the patriotism to come down and see this American monument.”

Da Silva, who came from Portugal as a college student, first visited Dighton Rock about 63 years ago, when it was still submerged in water. The rock — which features markings that some historians trace to early explorers, and others credit to Native Americans — has since been on display in the museum after it opened in 1977.

“Today is a very special date for me,” da Silva said. “Sixty-three years ago I was a student at New York University in biology and I came up here to see Dighton Rock for the first time. When I got here, because it was a full moon, the rock was covered by five feet of tidal water. I had to return the following day to see it covered with mud. What a tremendous change since then.”