



Bridge redone with '43 design

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The bridge was damaged in the 1985 tornado.

By ED RUNYAN

VINDICATOR TRUMBULL STAFF

NEWTON FALLS — A ribbon-cutting ceremony is planned for 2 p.m. Tuesday to mark completion of the renovation of the Newton Falls Covered Bridge on Arlington Street.

The event is being held by the Trumbull County engineer's office and city of Newton Falls.

Mike St. Jean, who lives at one end of the bridge, says one of his biggest questions will be what the bridge will sound like.

St. Jean moved into the house at the corner of Bridge and Jay streets about three years ago and got used to the sound of cars traveling over the wooden structure throughout the night. Saying it "lulled you to sleep," he came to appreciate the sound.

"At first I thought it was a thunderstorm," St. Jean said of the bridge. "I'm interested to see what it [the new bridge] sounds like." He assumes it will be quieter, though the goal of the project was to return the bridge to its 1943 appearance and most of its original construction.

A covered sidewalk was added in 1921, and two stone piers were added to help support the span in 1943. The stone piers were replaced with steel in 1962, and the piers were replaced this time with piers that were built to look like the ones from 1943. Modern roadway and walkway lighting and closed circuit cameras for security and fire protection were also installed this time.

St. Jean said having the bridge open will restore a convenient route to downtown for him and his neighbors.

He said watching the project since April has been interesting because of the use of the original construction methods and materials and the fact that the workers from the Righter Co. of Columbus lived in the buildings around him four days a week while they worked.

"They did a great job," St. Jean said.

Newton Falls native Ruth Sharec, a Newton Falls Library trustee who has worked in the library's local history room, says the bridge is important to Newton Falls' history because it was the main route in and out of the city for many years.

It's the second-oldest covered bridge in Ohio still in use in its original location, but it is also considered unique for having a covered sidewalk, Sharec said.

The renovation began in July 2005 but was sidelined by conflicts between BECDIR Construction of Berlin Center and the engineer's office. The county engineer's office eventually removed BECDIR from the project, and BECDIR sued the county. The case, being handled by Common Pleas Court Judge John M. Stuard, is pending.

In April, Trumbull County commissioners awarded an \$876,000 contract to Righter to finish the renovation.

When the workers finish the Newton Falls project, they are headed to another state to replace three more covered bridges.

"That's all they do is bridges," St. Jean said of the team from Righter.

Built in 1831, the bridge is the only one in Ohio with a covered crosswalk, and the last covered bridge in the county. The last significant work to the bridge was completed in 1985, after the bridge was damaged by a tornado.

The rehabilitation included replacement of the bridge siding, roof, deck planking, floor beams, sidewalk members and deteriorated or fractured timber members in the main truss. It also included replacement of steel piers with concrete piers built to look like stone.

The changes were made to restore the bridge to a structurally sound state and to greatly improve the bridge's appearance by returning it to its 1943 appearance, county engineer John Latell said.

The project was Righter's 32nd covered bridge project. Smolen Engineering of Jefferson handled project administration and daily inspection.

After the ribbon cutting, a reception will be held at the Newton Falls Public Library, 204 South Canal St.

A \$1.06 million federal construction grant obtained in 2002 through the County Engineers Association of Ohio paid for the work.

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