

Tabor

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Homme County.

The recent project was completed last week, with the crew high above the ground as they completed the task.

The high-rise project, rising over the Tabor skyline, wasn't for the faint of heart or those fearing heights. The steeple can be seen from a distance.

The crew needed an additional stretch to reach to complete the work, Kocer said.

"Ray's Painting of Volin did the work and told us it was 95 feet to the top," Kocer said. "It was so tall that they used an 85-foot-tall bucket truck with a 10-foot extender."

SURVIVING DAMAGE

The repainting and other restoration represent follow-up work from storm damage.

"When the derecho hit, it took the cross off the top," Kocer said. "The cross is five feet tall, and we needed to have it placed back on the steeple."

Facing such a daunting task, the parishioners turned to the nearby Maxwell Colony. The Hutterite colony, whose members live communally, jointly own and operate farmland, livestock, major buildings and equipment.

"We asked Maxwell Colony if they could put up the cross, because they have the large machinery to do the work," Kocer said. "They reached the top and welded the cross back in place. When they were working with the cross, they noticed the steeple was showing wear and tear. The seams were getting rusty, and it needed painting."

The Maxwell Colony members said they weren't able to help in restoring the steeple, according to parishioner Renee Hejna.

"The colony members are very willing to help others, particularly churches," she said. "They replaced the cross, but they told us they don't do painting."

Parishioners weren't even sure when the steeple last received a new coat of paint, Kocer said.

MOVING FORWARD

The parishioners discussed the needed work and ways of financing the project, Kocer said.



St. Wenceslaus parishioners Renee Hejna and Ken Kocer show the plaque designating the church (seen in the background) as the recipient of a Deadwood grant for historic preservation.

RANDY DOCKENDORF/PEAD

pastorate, which includes Yankton and areas to the north and west.

"Everything has to be approved by the pastorate, so it's been over a year in the making," Kocer said.

They faced two big hurdles: finding both someone to do the job and the funds to pay for it. God answered their prayers, providing resources for both needs.

First, the parish needed someone willing and able to perform the high-altitude effort, Kocer said. The search took them out of state.

"It's not easy to get estimates for painting that high up. We were finding that people wouldn't even quote it," he said. "One person from North Dakota gave us an estimate of \$75,000, and Ray's Painting out of Volin provided another quote of \$29,000."

Meanwhile, Rhonda Kocer — Ken's wife — serves as president of the church's Altar and Rosary Society. At a meeting last spring, she brought up the need to complete paperwork for grants and other outside funding. Hejna stepped forward

tion required three bids, and we only had two," she said. "I emailed Maxwell Colony, and they wouldn't even quote it because they don't do painting. But the Deadwood commission took it as my third estimate."

As part of her work, Hejna launched into research documenting the church's religious, historical and architectural background. She turned to several local sources for photos, documents and other corroboration.

Tabor resident Dennis Povondra, a St. Wenceslaus member, provided a valuable resource for information and photos. He has worked in-depth with historical research on the town, church and the area Czech heritage.

Povondra's photos included the footing of the cross that is part of the steeple, and Hejna took several photos of needed work.

As part of the application process, Hejna turned to the Bon Homme County register of deeds office to determine the church's ownership.

"The church owns it, but it wasn't spelled out that simply,

days before the deadline," she said. The effort proved fruitful, as did other outreach.

"At first, I thought the maximum we could receive from Deadwood was \$1,000. But when we were awarded the grant, we received \$10,000," Hejna said. "The church was also blessed with \$7,700 from the First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association (FCSLA Life). The remainder of the improvement was provided by our St. Wenceslaus Altar and Rosary Society kolache fund raiser and treasury."

Ray Jeffery and his crew began work Oct. 23, finishing the following week. During this work, Jeffery patched up holes in the steeple.

"Ray wasn't sure if the derecho caused rocks to hit and chip the steeple, but he did repair and repaint while he was up there," Ken Kocer said.

A STATEMENT OF FAITH

St. Wenceslaus no longer celebrates a weekend Mass, but its members note it remains an active church with weekly Masses and on special days, along with the continuation of ministries and other parish activities.

The church is currently open for prayer time from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, along with Masses every Wednesday at 6:15 p.m. and Friday at 8:30 a.m. The church will celebrate a special Mass at 7 p.m. Christmas Eve. Other special celebrations include Czech Days, the feast of St. Wenceslaus and holy days such as All Saint's Day.

Kris Kocer, Ken's sister, said the church represents more than brick and mortar. "This is our identity and our pride. It shows we're still alive and still have our faith," she said. "We're the only church in Tabor, so this is the only place we have to go and pray."

She pointed to the solemnity as parishioners arrived for Wednesday evening Mass. "You can feel the Holy Spirit in this church and in its people," she added.

Kris Kocer sees the steeple restoration as a statement of intention to preserve the church. "We praise the Lord and honor our ancestors; she said. "This is our way of keeping our identity."

The recently completed project offers an important example, Kris Kocer said. "There is the saying, 'Our steeple points the direction of