



Justice to be served on old courthouse

Historic building's leaky roof could be fixed by December

Lynh Bui

The Arizona Republic

Nov. 5, 2007 01:00 PM

Keeping the historic Pinal County 1891 Courthouse in Florence dry during heavy rains requires some inventiveness.

In one room, a large plastic tarp with a hole in the middle drapes from the ceiling, funneling water into a 30-gallon bucket on the ground. In the main courtroom, a children's wading pool is used to collect storm water. And, there have been elaborate systems of hoses used to route water into sinks or out of windows.

But Ernie Feliz hopes those stopgap measures will disappear by December, when construction crews are expected to complete the second phase of restoring one of the oldest courthouses in the state.

The second phase is expected to cost about \$700,000 and will focus on repairing the roof to prevent leaks from rotting wood and brick walls.

The Pinal County landmark has consumed a large part of Feliz's life since he started working as the county grants coordinator six years ago. Feliz has been raising money to help bring the piece of county history back to life.

"I don't think you can find another building in Pinal County that would capture your imagination in the same way this one does," Feliz said. "To allow that to go away would be a real shame."

In 2006, workers finished repairs and added new red shingles to the building's clock tower that was in danger of tipping over. That portion of the restoration cost about \$270,000.

Much of the money used to repair the courthouse has come from the Arizona State Parks Historic Preservation Heritage Fund, the Arizona Office of Tourism and the Office of Housing and Urban Development. Pinal County and Florence have also contributed money.

When it was built, the building was where most county business - from paying taxes to getting marriage licenses - took place, said H. Christine Reid, a researcher at the Pinal County Historical Society.

"It was meant to be a symbol of the grand future that lay ahead of us," Reid said. "It would be such a loss if we allowed it would be allowed to disappear. It is the essence of Florence."

The third phase of renovating the building calls for repairing the chimneys and dormers. After that, the courthouse will need a makeover from the inside.

The goal is to have the red and white building completely restored by 2016, the 125th anniversary of the courthouse's opening, Feliz said. If fundraising goes well, a portion of the building is expected to open by Arizona's state centennial in 2012.

It's unclear who will move into the building once it is completely renovated, but Feliz said the courthouse may be used as a visitor center and for meeting space.

With legends and lore of ghosts and famous trials tied to the courthouse, Feliz said he often wonders about what else happened in the historic building.

"It's important to maintain (the courthouse) for future generations to allow it to capture their imaginations as well."

Post a Comment

This is a public comment zone. Readers are solely responsible for the content of their posts and must comply with our [Terms of Service](#) and [Rules of Engagement](#). Report offensive content by clicking on the "Report abuse" link.

azcentral.com login required

- [sign in to post a comment](#) »
- [click here to register for a free account](#) »

Your Comment:

You must be logged in to post comments.

[Log In](#) | [Register](#)