

Ravenna's Flagpole Gets Reprieve

By Diane Smith | Staff Writer Published: November 25, 2012 4:00AM

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Six months after Ravenna's iconic flagpole gained some new "friends," it is half way toward being saved. The Friends of the Flagpole recently told Ravenna Township trustees that the preservationist group had raised more than \$70,000, with more meetings with service clubs scheduled and more potential pledges pending.

The group is aiming to raise \$150,000, with \$118,000 earmarked for the refurbishing of the 120-year-old pole, and the rest for improvements such as lighting and fencing.

"We're more than halfway there," said Jack Schafer, one of the founders of Friends of the Flagpole. The group recently presented its findings to the township trustees, who own the flagpole. The trustees had given the group six months to find a solution after Schafer and others appealed to the township not to raze the flagpole.

Friends of the Flagpole obtained a quote from Spensiere LLC, which proposed to take the pole down in three sections, take it to its facility in Syracuse, N.Y., repair it and ship it back to Ravenna and reassemble it. Spensiere, the group noted, recently refurbished a similar pole in Palmyra, N.Y.

"We're going to fix it up," said Township Trustee Patsy Artz. "It may take a year or so, but we're going to do it." She said trustees are looking into legal issues to see how the township can help. One area being investigated is the \$5,000 donated many years ago for maintenance. The donor only allows the township to use the interest from that fund, she said, and trustees want to know if that restriction can be lifted.

Last year, trustees weighed giving the flagpole away, or tearing it down. Instead, they commissioned a study to determine the structural integrity of the flagpole. The resulting report from Osborn Engineering called for \$206,000 in repairs to the flagpole. After adding \$30,000 in construction documents and \$10,000 to run a camera inside the main support beams to make sure there's no corrosion inside the pipes, that bill approached a quarter of a million dollars.

But Schafer, who worked as an architect specializing in historic preservation before taking over his family business, Trexler Rubber Company, said he evaluated the report, and concluded that the engineers don't think the situation is all that dire. He has estimated that preventative maintenance can be done for about \$10,000 per year.

Schafer and attorney Peggy DiPaola have been pitching their slide show on the flagpole and its history to service clubs, elected officials and others interested in historic preservation. They are sometimes accompanied by Robert Bruegmann, professor emeritus of art history, architecture and urban planning at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Bruegmann has written his articles about the pole.

The group thinks the flagpole was influenced by the Eiffel Tower in Paris which, although much taller, boasts a similar lattice construction pattern. Its height, though a fraction of the size of the tower in France, still rivaled the height of the tallest building in Ohio at the time -- the Society Bank in Cleveland.

"It's a unique character defining element of Ravenna and all of Portage County," Schafer said. DiPaola noted that the group is spreading awareness at the same time Ravenna's old high school is being demolished. "We know that once a historic structure is gone, it's gone for good," she said. Contact this reporter at 330-298-1139 or dsmith@recordpub.com

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