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Frame nearing completion in Geneseo barn raising

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By Christina Salter, csalter@qconline.com

Just last week, the site of the Antique Engine and Tractor Association's future home in Geneseo left much to the imagination.

Now, after seven days of a part old-fashioned, part technology-friendly barn raising, it's easy to visualize the final product from the nearly completed timber frame.

That frame will be done Thursday night, and all the panels will be in on Saturday, said Trillium Dell Timberworks owner Rick Collins. That will end the work by Trillium Dell and the Timber Framers Guild and start further work by the Antique Engine and Tractor Association.

Construction on the 48-by-70-foot structure began Aug. 12, with the community invited to participate in part of the process. The pre-cut timber frame was pre-assembled at the site so the pieces were ready when crane work begun last Friday.

AUDIO SLIDESHOW:



PHOTOS



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Photo: John Greenwood Helping set timbers for the new home of the Antique Engine & Tractor Association are, from left, Michele VandenHeuvel of Wisconsin, David Bates of Mount Carroll, and Ray and Kimberly Susong of North East Texas. The Susong's are members of the Timber Framers Guild. When asked why they traveled from Texas to help build the barn, Ray Susong said 'we've got to help each other out.' Trillium Dell Timberworks, along with the Timber Framers Guild and a group of volunteers, joined to create the timber barn which will likely last for hundreds of years. More photos from this shoot

The Timber Framers Guild — a nonprofit, educational organization — is the project's primary contractor. About 27 guild members joined AETA members, with about 12 local volunteers working on floor framing, building posts and other tasks, Mr. Collins said. The construction process was intended to be a community event, he said.

"In this area there still exists the mentality of working together to help people out," Mr. Collins said.

The barn is the planned "centerpiece of our new showgrounds," said Chuck Bos, chairman of the association's building committee. Once the structure is fully enclosed, members will focus on their annual antique engine and tractor show planned Sept. 18-20 in Atkinson, he said. Afterwards, work will continue on the roof, wall siding and electrical system.

The barn should be completely finished in time to host next year's show, Mr. Bos said. A smaller building under construction nearby will house a sawmill.

The construction process has attracted continuous visitors, he said. As the frame nears completion, the rest of this week will be the best time to watch.

"Most barns were built like this in the 1800s and 1900s," Mr.

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Bos said. "A lot of people grew up around these buildings, but most have never seen one go up."

The guild also has held workshops to teach members the craft. Mr. Bos said many people will be traveling into the area to learn panel installation on timber frames, perhaps the first workshop of its kind.

Workshops also include training on forklifts, scaffolding, raising, rigging and general safety practices. The experience is meant to train the guild's members "just like any other trade," said Mr. Collins, who also is president of the guild's board of directors.

For onlookers and volunteers, the interest in the "big, elegant" barn likely comes from the tradition of community involvement in barn raising, Mr. Collins said. He noted that all of barn's materials are from within a 100-mile radius, something that "just doesn't happen today."

"It's all Illinois labor going back into this part of the country," Mr. Collins said.

Olive Norris of Arizona said she watched the barn raising while in Geneseo on Tuesday with her brother, two sisters and a friend. She was among about 10 onlookers, some with binoculars and cameras, under a tent just outside the hard-hat zone.

The process was interesting to watch, she said, adding she initially was surprised to learn contractors would be using cranes and steel.

"We have the best of both worlds — the old way and new way of building," she said.

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