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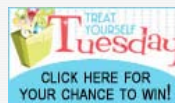


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Saturday, April 11, 2009 4:27 PM CDT

### Repairs come to Wapsipinicon Mill a year after floods

By JOSH NELSON, Courier Staff Writer

INDEPENDENCE --- The whooshing sound of water is everywhere in the Wapsipinicon Mill.

"We're not near the river. We're on the river, so we know we'll get it sometime," said Leanne Harrison, president of the Buchanan County Historical Society.

The Wapsipinicon River invaded the mill's lower levels last summer, buckling wooded floors before retreating. The scenario has happened before and will happen again.

Skilled craftsmen are laboring this week to make sure the floors won't suffer like before, however. Contractors with Trillium Dell Timberworks are restoring the flooring to its original design when the mill was built in the 1860s, which is more resistant to the influences of high water than the existing layout.

"Every time a flood came through, it was going to continue to get taken out," said Tim Narkiewicz, project manager for Trillium.

At some point in history, the floor changed, Narkiewicz said. Gurts --- heavy wooden timbers measuring 12 inches on each side and 10 feet long --- were detached from one another, allowing them to float off whenever water entered the basement.

Where the gurts were missing, the floor drooped.

That was the scene Narkiewicz saw in June when he entered the mill after the most recent flood.

"The floor was all over," he said. "Some of it had dropped down."

Narkiewicz said it's important to find ways to prevent future damage in the basement floor because it could eventually jeopardize the structural integrity of the seven-story building.

Trillium has experience working on historic buildings. The company helped restore wooden dome supports for the Iowa's original statehouse in Iowa City after a fire.

In Independence, Trillium will install white oak joists and floorboards, which are more resistant to water and rot. The company also hopes to recycle materials from the floor or find similar materials used in the mill's original construction.

"We'll get the most historically accurate products we can," he said.

For now the mill basement is an open cavern revealing thick concrete pilings and the muddy river bottom. The pylons, however, aren't original. They were probably added at the turn of the 20th century.

The pylons show signs of wear. Some have cracks and may need to be repaired. Below, tree trunks, plastic buckets and other debris from past floods are still visible.

While the 2008 flood was devastating in many Iowa towns, but as far as the mill is concerned, there have been worse. In 1999, high water forced out large windows in the basement.

Lynn Beier, a mill manager, said the historical society plans on opening for tours and programs May 16. She says trying to organize events with the floor damaged has been difficult. She doesn't think summer plans will be affected, however.

"I don't think it's going to stop us from having any events," she said.

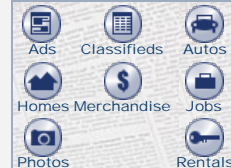


Ed Powell, left, and Ryan Owens of Trillium Dell Timberworks in Knoxville, Ill., beat sections of flooring apart during renovation efforts at the Wapsipinicon Mill in Independence. Floods damaged the historic structure. (RICK CHASE / Courier Staff Photographer)

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The repairs will cost about \$20,000. The bulk of the bill will be paid by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and by state emergency management.

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