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New beginnings start from the top, down

By Jan Gottesman MANAGING EDITOR



Above, the Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church, on Church Street, Clinton, before the steeple was removed on Wednesday. Center, the steeple swings between Clinton Town Hall (left) and the church. (Item photos/JAN GOTTESMAN)

CLINTON — The New Year is about new beginnings.

The Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church, on Church Street, next to town hall, is starting the New Year with a new look. Members hope, however, with community support, it will only be temporary.

The green-painted spire was lifted off the church Wednesday morning, so structural repairs can be done to the lantern level (below the belfry).

"The structure is so badly rotten, it cannot be saved," said Philip Warbasse, an architect with Chenot Associates, Inc.

The Seventh-day congregation bought the building, a former Unitarian Church, about 10 years ago, after the structure had remained vacant for about 25 years.

The church was originally built in 1853, and was lifted 13 feet in 1872, so a new first floor could be added. The original steeple was hit by lightning and had to be replaced in 1901; the current steeple, which has its wooden spire painted green to resemble oxidized copper, was hit by lightning in 1922

and still shows some fire damage.

Leonardo Caines, a church elder and project manager, said a fundraising campaign will begin to help pay for the work. The congregation had the \$50,000 to have the steeple removed and the belfry floor water-tight to project the main church structure. The inside of the steeple (which includes the spire, the belfry and the lantern area) needs structural reinforcement before it can all be put back together. It will cost several hundred thousand dollars to do all the restoration work.

Tom Murray, a representative of the Southern New England Conference, which governs the Seventh-day Adventists in the region, said structural work has been done on the church since it was purchased and this restoration "should be the end of it. It really is beautiful inside."

"It all comes down to fundraising," said Jason Murray, of Murray Brothers Construction, which is doing the work. "We don't know how much structure will be needed. The work will be relatively easy, but it is all about raising the funds."