

# Brentsville Courthouse cupola revamped

## Historic item gets face lift before its return to apex

By **CHRISTINE RODRIGO**  
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The Brentsville Courthouse cupola looks quite different now than it did in August, when cranes lifted it from the peak of the two-story building that formerly served as the Prince William County seat.

Where weathered white wood once sheltered a bell, the cupola is now a natural cedar that will be painted white before it is returned to the courthouse apex in a few weeks, said Lou Ann Purkins, county architect.

Over the past 3½ months, the 13-foot-tall, 2,800-pound domed cupola was revamped in one of the most visible projects undertaken to rehabilitate the historic 179-year-old building, which served as the county courthouse from 1822 to 1883.

Most of the old wood was rotted and couldn't be saved. Cedar is a historically accurate replacement choice that will resist moisture and bugs, Purkins said.

Avon Corp. of Springfield began restoration work on the red brick courthouse in July. The first phase of the project also included replacing doors, gutters and windows and installing new heating, air conditioning and electrical systems. But other interior repairs planned for the first phase can't begin until project proponents raise \$100,000, said Pamela Sackett, chairwoman of the Friends of Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre.

The additional funds are needed to install new floors and

plaster the interior walls to cover up exposed wiring; the walls and floor were torn up to install the new heating, air conditioning and electrical systems. The courthouse is closed to the public until the floor and walls are finished.

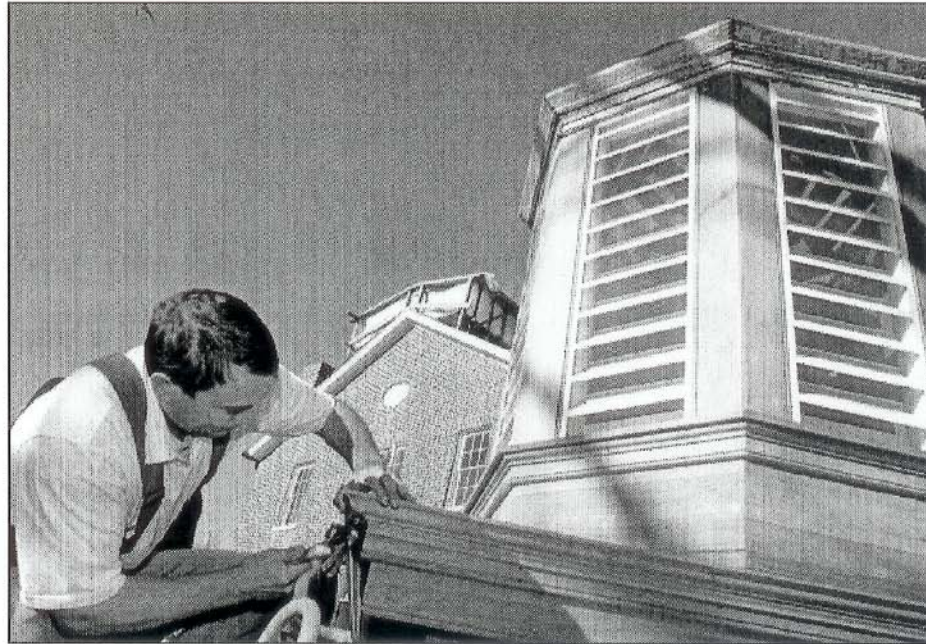
"Until we can make up that [\$100,000] difference, we won't be able to get back into the courthouse to raise funds," Sackett said, noting that few other spaces can accommodate the crowds attracted to the Friends' events. More than 500 people regularly attend the group's free Christmas Open House, which this year will be held from noon to 5 p.m. Saturday at the Freedom Museum in the terminal building at Manassas Regional Airport.

The shortfall is the result of grant requests that were only partially funded. In the past three years, the Friends have submitted three requests for Transportation Enhancement Application grants, which are federal grants issued through the state Department of Transportation, said Wilkie Leith, chairwoman of the Brentsville Historic Centre Trust.

"We shoot for the moon and hope to get halfway," she said.

Leith did not know how much money had been requested in past years, but said the group has received a total of \$350,000 through the grant process plus other state and county funds and private contributions.

"In five years, we've raised more money for this project than any other historic project in Prince William County,"



Rick Kintzel/Journal

**Tony Burke of Avon Corp. nails down a piece of crown molding Tuesday on the cupola that will go atop the Brentsville Courthouse.**

Leith said.

The Trust is a cooperative effort between Prince William County, the Prince William County Park Authority and the courthouse Friends. The 21 acres controlled by the trust are owned by the county and its

Park Authority and contain four buildings: the courthouse, a jail built in 1822, the Brentsville Union Church built in 1872 and a one-room schoolhouse built in 1928.

Thus far, courthouse building repairs have totaled about

\$450,000, including archaeological digs, architectural studies and design of a master plan for the 21-acre site, Leith said. The total project cost is estimated at \$1.2 million, including interior renovations which are yet to be done.

The Brentsville Courthouse, at 12239 Bristow Road, is one of a few Southern courthouses to have survived the Civil War. After the county seat moved to Manassas in 1883, the building was used as a schoolhouse, and later as a mattress factory.