

Eagle Scout project focuses on preserving church history

by

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Just because equipment isn't used, doesn't mean it shouldn't be preserved.

The bells at First United Methodist Church of Warren are not rung by someone pulling on wooden handles connected by cables to the clappers.

That system was used from 1927 when the bells were first installed through the 1970s. At that time, an electric keyboard system was installed and the ringing of the bells became less labor-intensive.

Over the past three years, the church has renovated the century-old equipment and added three new bells.

But, the wooden handles still worked — a wooden bar had been locked in place to make sure the bells were not accidentally rung that way. Although it wasn't used, it was a part of the history of the church.

Along the way to becoming an Eagle Scout, Judd Demers made sure that piece of history was preserved.

Demers, a Boy Scout in Troop 13 of North Warren, has been in Scouting since 2016.

He was also a "call-to-worship carillonneur" for several years, under the tutelage of FUMC Music Director Ruth Nelson. When he was looking for an Eagle project, Nelson suggested the carillon.

Working with his father, David, and his grandfather, Dean Berry, Judd disassembled the console in the tower and moved all 262 pieces to a garage.

The team, which included some fellow Scouts and some other adults, but was mostly family, spent 305 hours — over 200 of them Judd's — on the project. Undoing the damage the wood had incurred over time took the bulk of that time. "I learned that even a shop-vac is no match for the amount of dust created by sanding wood that's been wet for over 90 years," Demers said.

After rehabilitating the pieces, including chemical cleaning of the brass connections and decorations, Demers and the team reassembled the console, then stained and coated it.

"The most rewarding part of the project was learning how to work with century-old wood," he said. "I also enjoyed honoring the historic value of such a unique musical instrument."

Judd tracked down wood of a similar age to create a wheeled platform on which to display the console. That wood came from a local house built in 1910.

The console is now on display in the church parlor, with a plaque identifying the donors and patrons who contributed to the bell tower renovation project.

On Dec. 14, Demers passed his Eagle Scout Board of Review. A ceremony is set for 4 p.m. Sunday, April 18, at the church. Demers will, naturally, be playing the carillon — the new one — at the beginning of the event.

"Overall, the project taught me the value of persistence, and the role family and faith can play in setting and achieving goals," Demers said.