

RELIGION

Church to take part in Museum Day

Worcester's St. Martin's Episcopal will offer tours

By Brice Stump
Staff Writer

SHOWELL — There is no museum like it in all of Worcester County.

After years of restoration work, the former St. Martin's Episcopal Church is ready to host its first International Museum Day in just a few weeks. It was in 1994 that St. Martin's Episcopal Church Museum Foundation obtained a deed to the property and undertook restoration of the 1763 structure.

Regular services had all but been discontinued in the 1960s and the vacant building came perilously close to being lost, said Sherrie Beckstead, foundation president. In the early 1990s, local preservationist Tom Patton set into motion the creation of a committee to oversee the saving and restoration of the county landmark.

Religious programs are still held here, especially during the Christmas holidays. Museum Day will give the foundation an opportunity to familiarize the public with the historic building.

"All the museums in the county will be open that day," said board officer Susan Mariner, "but we are the only church museum in the county. This is our first participation in Museum Day and, of course, we are excited."

Foundation board officers will join docents during the May 18 event from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. to greet visitors, offer interior and exterior tours of the 4-acre site and to serve light refreshments. Music of the 18th century will set the mood for an authentic taste of the period, Beckstead said. The museum will be open, free of charge. The church is the oldest of any of the 11 museums in the county.

Accurate restoration of the church interior allows visitors to see up close the 18th century architectural and woodworking details which make the museum special. Folks will also hear the story about how three of the church's early priests are buried in the floor of the



Brice Stump photo

Members of St. Martin's Episcopal Church Museum, near Showell, will greet visitors to the circa 1763 brick structure during International Museum Day on May 18. From left are Susan Mariner, J.D. Quillin, Sherrie Beckstead and Theresa Bruner.

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Susan Mariner
St. Martin's Episcopal Church
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sanctuary — one in front of the pulpit, one under the bricks in front of the altar and one in a corner of the 44 x 44-foot building.

The restoration of the church has special meaning for founding board member J.D. Quillin, Vice President Theresa Bruner and Mariner since all three grew up in the area and have memories of the aging building in the countryside.

"My husband's ancestor was a priest who served here and is



Brice Stump photo

Built about 1763, St. Martin's Episcopal Church has recently been restored and is now Worcester County's only church museum.

buried in front of the pulpit," Mariner said.

"I lived across the road, on a farm, and remembered seeing the church as a child," Bruner said.

Aside from the education and entertainment aspects of the day event, Beckstead said it is also an opportunity for the public to become aware of the efforts and costs involved to

operate and maintain a museum, especially one more than 250 years old.

The church museum is available, for a fee, to the public for nondenominational weddings, baptisms and other functions, said Quillin. St. Martin's will be open each Saturday, 11 a.m.-1 p.m. June through August.

The foundation is already well involved in preparing for its first St. Martin's Day Celebration, set for Nov. 11, 2011. In addition to an annual Christmas program, members hope the celebration event will also become an annual tradition.

"St. Martin's Day is a very popular festivity in Europe and we want to align ourselves as closely as possible with St. Martin's Day celebrations in Germany, France and England," Beckstead said.

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