

If you appreciate history, you know the thrill of finding the smallest shard of it while exploring outside or looking in your attic. Too often, we experience little bits of history behind glass and away from touch in museums and exhibits. So when you're offered a tactile and personal confrontation with our heritage, it can be a very powerful experience.

Delmarva provides some truly special opportunities to walk through, touch and experience history in significant ways. One such opportunity is the historic Saint Martin's Church near the intersection of Routes 113 and 589 in Showell, Md. With much of the surviving structure being approximately 255 years old, visitors find themselves surrounded with a large-scale, intact piece of Colonial American life. And, thanks to The Saint Martin's Church Foundation, this gem of Colonial history is being preserved and communicated to extend its venerable purpose for generations to come.

"Historic Saint Martin's was built in 1756 and is one of the oldest structures on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It was built 20 years prior to the signing of The Declaration of Independence," relates Saint Martin's Church Foundation president Sherrie Beckstead. "The Flemish-Bond brick landmark not only mirrors Maryland's history, but on a grander scale, also spans America's history and the culture of our country."

Being a more than two century survivor means there are numerous preservation issues, the solutions to which must be both affordable and historically correct to do the structure justice. "While serving as the steward for a 255-year-old edifice, the



Worshiping History: The Saint Martin's Church Foundation Keeps a Unique Piece of American Heritage Alive

Executive Committee of the Board is continually reassessing and prioritizing needs, keeping a continuous balance of budget, function and historic accuracy," says Beckstead. "We are working closely with our partners at The Maryland Historic Trust, their continued support being an integral part of our missions to 'preserve and protect' Historic Saint Martin's."

What's exciting about Saint Martin's as a structure are the wonderful features referencing more than two centuries of life. The church's extraordinarily elevated pulpit, its rustic original brick floor and its principal rafter with King Post framing are beautifully crafted remembrances of early American architecture. The more than two-acre site also provides a beautiful, peaceful experience for visitors. Because of its unique character, the church has proven perfect for couples seeking a memorable marriage experience.

"Saint Martin's Church Foundation has an array of preferred services to assist brides and grooms with their dream of an historic wedding, facilitating the simplicity and elegance of an 18th century ceremony," says Beckstead. "Our foundation also offers renewal of vows ceremonies. Additionally, we can offer recommendations that include historic receptions with horse and carriage service."

Beyond being an exquisite piece of American heritage worth preserving, Saint Martin's is also a wonderful resource to enrich the community. "Our mission, post restoration, is to serve as a center for education and help to facilitate the arts in our community while serving residents and visitors alike," explains Beckstead.

Increasing the utilization, enjoyment and awareness of Saint Martin's



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— Sherrie Beckstead**

Church includes making it open and attractive to the public in a number of ways. As one of The Worcester County Museums, Saint Martin's has an Open House schedule running May through October, which in 2011 includes celebration of International Museum Day on May 18th, a concert series for summer, an Educational Speakers Series and a Shakespearean play being planned for fall.

Especially important is the Historic Saint Martin's Day Celebration from Nov. 11 to 14, 2011. On Saint Martin's Day, Nov. 11, there will be festivities on the church grounds including period foods, fine wines and music. In conjunction with the celebration, the foundation will also honor those that have donated pews and supported the restoration.

As part of its fundraising efforts, the foundation also contracted with master goldsmith and Smithsonian honoree Stephen Clarke to create a pendant replicating "The Key" to Historic Saint Martin's. The pendant will be available for purchase on the foundation's website and at select distribution points. Proceeds from pendant sales and events go towards supporting long-term goals, which include funding an auxiliary building on the property, creating a center to engage in and facilitate history preservation efforts, and events supporting music and the arts.

In addition to funds, human capital is also a big part of the foundation's efforts. "The community has embraced this restoration. For instance, when we needed a team to assist with a cleanup, one of our Board members, Sean Rayne arranged for a Cub Scout pack to tour the site and participate in the recycling and cleanup," Beckstead notes regarding the board's and community's willingness to step up to the challenge. "We are a fully engaged volunteer Board of Trustees, and we are always seeking assistance from the community."



To get involved with this worthy effort, contact The Saint Martin's Church Foundation Inc., at P.O. Box 590, Berlin, Md., 21811, 410-430-2142. And to get in on the fun throughout the season, you'll find all of the final plans for Historic Saint Martin's spring through fall season listed on the foundation's website, www.historicsaintmartinschurch.org, and on the Museums of Worcester County website, www.worcestermuseums.org.

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