

# Rocky Ford Daily Gazette

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Robert Bohannon, foreman with an Associated Crafts crew, points to a portion of repairs he and his crew have completed on the stained glass dome at the CommUnity Presbyterian Church in Rocky Ford. (Photo By Susan Pieper)

### Crew Returns Heritage To Local Congregation

By Susan Pieper

A glance "heavenward," so to speak, led to a discovery by Ron Aschermann, a member of the CommUnity Presbyterian Church in Rocky Ford. That discovery – blue sky – then led to a three-man crew coming from Iowa to effect some repairs on one particular stained glass window at the church.

According to Aschermann, Mable June Smedema was presenting a program on one of the church's assets, its windows, when he looked up as she was describing the building's stained glass dome. Looking at the glass, he noticed he could see blue sky. That meant there was a problem with the dome.

The dome, which is only visible from inside the sanctuary, was probably installed when the current building was constructed in 1906. Actually, according to Francie Miller, secretary at the church, the first church building was completed May 3, 1891, at a cost of \$3,000.

The cornerstone was laid at the present location on Dec. 18, 1906, with the structure at 303 S. Ninth being completed in October 1907 and costing \$25,000.

Nearly eight years later, the structure was nearly destroyed by a fire caused by an overheated stove in the kitchen. At that time, many of the beams were damaged by fire with only some being replaced.

A trip to the attic where the three-man crew "holed up" for the last three days gave visitors a glance at the damage caused by the 1916 fire. Charred wood braced by newer lumber was evident in one corner, but structurally, everything appeared to be sound.

The dome, however, had begun to buckle, according to Robert Bohannon, foreman with the crew from Associated Crafts based in Gilbert, AZ, thus allowing blue sky to

be visible through the dome's stained glass.

Sixteen panels form the dome and all 16 were repaired by this company which specializes in restoration and preservation of stained glass windows. The repair process involved resoldering the panels and putting in some bracing to give needed strength to the base of the dome.

Two of the Associated Crafts crew – in this case, Bohannon and Nevel Wiggins – worked from the top side of the dome while Emer Carlson did his work from the top of a lift on the sanctuary side of the dome.

Carlson physically pushed each panel back into place while Bohannon and Wiggins resoldered from above. Sounds rather simple, but the top of the dome is over 40 feet from the sanctuary floor. So, while Carlson pushed, Bohannon and Wiggins leaned over the dome, careful not to break the glass, and reworked the leading, pulling it back into place. Plus, their work surface was about the width of a plank.

Those working conditions, however, did not put a damper on the story-telling of other churches on which the crew had worked, the people they had met, the obstacles they had overcome. All of these stories, though, were laced together with one common thread – that of returning a part of a church's heritage to the congregation.

The stained glass in a church, according to Bohannon, tells a story about a congregation and its history. Now, following Associated Crafts' restoration of one of the hallmarks of the CommUnity Presbyterian Church, that story can continue with generations to come being able to look up and see the sun coming through the magnificent stained glass dome and bathing the sanctuary in its light.

