

## Restoration on the Riverline: Beverly church focuses on historic preservation as part of town revitalization

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### RESTORATION ON THE RIVERLINE

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BEVERLY, N.J., Sept. 23 –On the thoroughfare of Beverly, a Burlington County industrial river town looking for some renewal, a structure older than the town itself is taking on a revitalization of its own. Prominently situated on Warren Street, St. Stephen's Episcopal church served as a navigational landmark on the Delaware River's main transportation corridor but at over 150-years old the property is beginning to show its age.

"Before, any size project was done piecemeal," says St. Stephen's rector, Fr. Robert Legnani. "You knew someone who could do the work whether it was heating and air conditioning, plumbers, electricians. This time around there are more young professional people who understand things like grants, etc. This time we feel like we're doing it right and it will last a long time."

With the help of architectural firm Farewell Mills & Gatsch, the St. Stephen's community navigated through a 7-year long New Jersey Historic Trust grants process obtaining awards for a preservation plan, engineering studies and finally construction.

Wu & Associates, Inc, the selected preservation contractor, is focused on restoring the church's "beacon" feature, the steeple. Following a lightning strike in 1983 the structure burned down two-thirds of the way. While the immediate problem was solved with a lightning rod, according to Fr. Legnani, the replacement cedar shakes were no match for Beverly's curious woodpeckers and squirrels.

"One of the problems is the number of holes in the cedar shakes. The NJHT trust wants to preserve the origin of the church. So what are we going to construct the steeple with? Looking at some old photos and a 1909 postcard, the steeple looks as dark as the roof. There is a good chance it was originally slate."

While the range of stained-glass window styles and woodwork within the building are the most elaborate of the church's designs, Wu & Associates work stabilizing the structure and preserving the simplicity of the building's design is important in saving the history of its architectural story and its place in Beverly's.

As an indication of the church's impact on Beverly, the grants are supplemented by not only the contributions of members, highlighted by the over \$4,000 raised by the parish children's "Mile of Nickels" campaign, but also businesses and other people in the larger town community. Some feel a connection to the church because of town-wide events held there and others do simply because they have friends within the congregation.

As part of the Beverly community at large, St. Stephen's Restoration is on track to finish in plenty of time to show off for the holiday season at which time the church is a premier stop on the Riverfront Historical Society's Christmas Tour.

Wu & Associates, Inc. is a general contractor based in the southern New Jersey hub of Cherry Hill. Celebrating its 19th year in the building industry, Wu & Associates, Inc. provides general contracting and design/build services to clients in



the NJ, PA, DE, NY, and MD regions, with special emphasis on historic preservation, educational facilities, and industrial/commercial complexes.

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