

Local & State

Church steeple undergoes restoration

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As the 150-year-old steeple was lifted off the roof of Leeds United Methodist Church, Ross Gibson said he had to find a bigger crane.

"When I first tried to pick it up, the crane wasn't big enough," he said.

Gibson, a restoration contractor based in North East, expected the steeple to weigh 4,000 pounds.

"It weighed 9,000 pounds," Gibson said. So the 22-ton crane was replaced with a 68-ton model.

Once the steeple was on the ground, Gibson and his crew removed the aluminum siding that covered white pine timbers.

"There's some significant damage. The bell tower was so rotten and deteriorating," Gibson said.

Part of the work involved evicting the residents of the tower.

"There were lots of squirrel nests," he said.

Jim Slagle, church trustee, said the steeple is the latest project Gibson has undertaken for Leeds.

"He repaired our slate roof," Slagle said. "Ross knows what he's doing."

Gibson has been in the business of church and home restoration for more than 25 years.

Leeds United Methodist Church was built in 1885. The steeple and bell tower are part of the original construction.

"We debated taking it down, putting up something



CECIL WHIG PHOTO BY MATT GIVEN

A construction worker nails down plywood Thursday while working to restore the base of the Leeds United Methodist Church steeple, seen in the background after being lowered to the parking lot below.

smaller," Slagle said.

However, church leaders decided it was an important part of the history of the congregation on Blue Ball Road near Elkton.

"It is unique," he said. "It was time to have major work done to it."

Gibson said the tower should be back by October.

"We're two weeks into it. I expect it to take another month," he said.

Gibson plans to use as much of the original wood as possible.

Slagle wasn't certain if a service would be held to commemorate the steeple's return to the top of the church.



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The steeple is lit by afternoon sunshine as several workers restore its base atop the church.