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## Cavers complete Fort Stanton restoration project

by Eugene Heathman/Editor

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Sunday a tourist from Alaska along with several other visitors were amazed by all the activity at Fort Stanton. Explaining the project, historian and Fort advocate, Lynda Sánchez mentioned that this was a special undertaking initiated by the South West Region of the National Speleological Society (NSS) in exchange for use of the grounds and buildings on site. The NM State Monuments Division had agreed to purchase the supplies, and the SWR folks were to complete the planning and the labor. It was beneficial to all sides and on Memorial Day the organization will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary on the Fort Stanton Parade Grounds.

A member of the group commented that this was a positive and wonderful idea and that perhaps each building should have such a group of interested people to help with restoration or renovation. On that everyone agreed.

Lynda Sánchez, the Public Outreach Liaison for the group said, “This project is yet another example of what can be done with innovation, care, and a goal oriented group.”

Only last month on a very cold weekend the project began with cavers turned into carpenters as they removed rotting wooden spindles (103 in total) and railing from one of the oldest of the Fort Stanton buildings that had seen service from 1866 to the present. Initially the sandstone building had been a guard house, and then changed over time and was added on to as it became the post adjutant’s office, reading room, library, post office and theater. It now serves as the maintenance office for the Fort Stanton State Monument.

The second phase in March was for those who had taken the spindles or balusters home to refurbish or simply to replace what was needed in the rotting wood. The final phase of the restoration project occurred March 30 and April 1. Approximately 30 individuals travelled from as far away as Arizona and Texas to participate. Several of the volunteers came from different areas of New Mexico as well. The project volunteers arrived with good cheer and plenty of energy to work and complete this incredible project. Caulking, sanding, primer being

applied and painting all occurred within a very short time. Despite some wind and dust the beautiful new wooden balusters made everyone proud as they carefully reinstalled each one. The final railing is exquisite and shows that the original workmanship and skilled carpenters that they had many years ago was incredible. Of course, the present skill set was amazing as well.

According to Sánchez, “I just hope that by working in this manner the people of Lincoln County and statewide can see what a magnificent site we have here and that it can motivate folks to help fill in the gaps in a down turn of the economy. However, it takes leadership and thinking outside the box. It also takes a heck of a lot of talent to do what they have done in such a short time. These guys don’t make excuses; they just ‘do it’!”

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