

# Cavers work on Fort Stanton

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Caver John Moses removes the top rail from Amusement... (Photo Courtesy Pete and Karen Lindsley)

Although they're used to spending hours underground exploring and mapping caves, members of the Southwest Regional National Speleological Society pitched in last month above ground and will again this month to repair and restore balusters on one of the buildings at Fort Stanton State Monument.

As part of the SWR's 50th Anniversary celebration, several volunteers agreed to perform a public service project in exchange for use of the cafeteria and other buildings at the fort for activities and a banquet set for the Parade Grounds at the end of May, said local historian Lynda Sanchez, a SWR volunteer and fort advocate.

The assignment selected was to repair the second floor balcony rails and supports on Building 9.

Historically the building dates to 1866 when it was first used as a stone guard house, later changing to the Adjutant's office," she said. "In 1877, came major improvements in the Adjutant's Office, and a library was added. Toward the end of the 1890's, it metamorphosed into a school reading room, post office and recreation hall. During the 1930's to 1950's, it was also a movie hall. It currently serves as the facility manger's office and work area."

The project should be finished by the end of March, she said.

"I like to call this kind of project 'saving Fort Stanton one nail, one balustrade at a time,'" Sanchez said. "Building number 9, like many of the 1870's structures needed repair and just plain old TLC. In this situation, the railing or balustrade along the second story was badly deteriorating and required painting, replacement of balusters and other parts that had totally rotted."

She said according to Fort Stanton State Monument spokesperson, Bennie Long, the State Monuments' Division is furnishing the materials for the project and the cavers are providing the

labor. Reconstruction and wood working experts discussed the process, identified and ordered the materials.

The work will span two weekend, an amazing turnaround time testifying to the effectiveness of the team effort, she said.

"The preparation stage of the work was done Feb. 23-24, and involved removal of the rotten wood, measuring and marking the pieces as they were removed, salvaging appropriate existing wood for re-use, cutting and assembly of wood sections, cutting a bevel on the top rail covers to minimize future water damage and priming much of the wood structure as required," said team member Peter Lindsley. "Most of the 7-8 workers were experienced in wood working and use of saws and related tools. More than 100 people-hours were expended on the preparation work days. About 20-30 of the balusters that were in the worst shape were taken to Las Cruces for re-building by Wayne Walker, Steve Peerman and others with about another 60 hours expended so far."

"I understand that Sam Townsley with Fort Stanton Maintenance was able to remove one of the metal caps on the units between the rails which greatly assisted the planning of the repairs," he said.

Most of the wood will receive additional paint during a March 24 Southwest Regional National Speleological Society meeting and work trip.

Founded in 1962, activities of the SWR of the NSS include exploration, mapping, cave inventory, scientific study, public education and awareness, and conservation and restoration volunteer efforts with the National Public Lands, Bureau of Land Man-agement and the U.S. Forest Service.

Members have been active in exploration of Fort Stanton Cave.

"We are expecting around 20-30 workers during the main reconstruction event on Sat-urday the 24th of March," he said.