

One man's legacy of preservation

Mark and Jeff Crane were honored for saving the old Methodist Church steeple in the Four Corners.

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Penfield's Four Corners would be missing one of its most notable landmarks if it weren't for the preservation efforts of the late Jeff Crane and his brother Mark Crane.

Jeff Crane, the owner and operator of several Mark's Pizzerias in the Rochester area, died Sunday, Dec. 24, 2006, at the age of 45. He was a Fairport resident and 1980 graduate of Fairport High School.

Before his untimely death, Mr. Crane was committed to preserving the Four Corners, said Jim Costello, director of development for the town of Penfield.

"He was instrumental in a lot of the work that was done in the Four Corners," he said.

George Shaw, chairman of the Historic Preservation Board for more than 30 years, said the Cranes went above and beyond their call of duty when they decided to save the bell tower in the old Methodist Church at 2106 Five Mile Line Road, which is currently home to a branch of Continuing Developmental Services and a small church. Inspired by the Cranes' efforts, the Historic Preservation Board has decided to give out an annual award in memory of Jeff Crane.



STAFF PHOTO/AMY CAVALIER

Mark Crane and his brother, the late Jeffrey Crane, were honored by the Penfield Historic Preservation Board for saving the bell tower on the old Methodist Church.

"The board felt it was a gift to future generations of Penfield to have the church and tower remain intact," Costello said.

The Jeffrey S. Crane Historic Preservation Award will be given out annually to "individuals who have cared for Penfield's past through the preservation of a structure with historic significance."

The 2007 Award was presented to Jeff and Mark Crane for their efforts to preserve the church, which was constructed in 1843.

"The Cranes are head and shoulders above in the way of contributions to the town and willingness," said Shaw. "They have done and are doing a magnificent job."

It was discovered last year that the church's bell tower

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was leaning as a result of rotting structural beams and a heavy bell that's been in it since the 1850s, according to Mark Crane. Last year, the Cranes approached the Historic Preservation Board about the steeple.

"They thought maybe they'd take it down and put a flat cover up there," said Shaw. "We didn't like that because it's such an outstanding part of our early history. It's one of the outstanding buildings going back to the 1800s."

After lengthy discussions and inspections by engineers, it was determined that saving the steeple would be too costly. Shaw said the Historic Preservation Board reluctantly gave the Cranes permission to take it down. Meanwhile, brothers Mark and Jeff Crane couldn't come to a unanimous decision over what to do about the steeple.

"Jeff wanted it fixed," Mark said. "He wouldn't leave me alone ... I had a good relationship with my brother. I miss him and would have done anything for him."

So Mark, who does most of the construction and carpentry work on the pizza shops and other properties that the Cranes own, went over to take

"one more good look at it."

"I said 'It ain't gonna be easy, but we'll get it,'" Mark recalls. "Being that he passed away, that's one job I'm glad I did."

Based on the Crane's track record of work in the Four Corners, Jon-Paul Dyson, a member of the Historic Preservation Board, said the group wasn't completely surprised when the Cranes decided to salvage the church tower.

"The Cranes have invested a lot of time and money into the Four Corners area," he said. "It was surprising in the sense that it was such a large investment, but it wasn't a dramatic departure from their past proactive and productive efforts into taking care of the Four Corners area."

The Cranes tackled the church steeple work over the summer.

They even donned gas masks to clean years of pigeon excrement out of the tower. "We shoveled that out together," Mark said. "That was the worst job I've ever done."

In the five years that Mark and his brother have owned the church, Mark Crane said they've rehabilitated the entire building from the inside out, including pulling up trees out of the parking

lot and paving it.

"The church probably hasn't looked better in 80 years," Shaw said.

Mark Crane has continued in his brother's footsteps. He is currently rehabilitating the interior and exterior of the Mark's Pizzeria in the Four Corners, where Jeff Crane spent much of his time. Inside, there will be a wall dedicated to him.

"We're trying to make it extra nice because of Jeff and making the pizza shop fall in with the rest of the character of the Four Corners," Mark Crane said. "That's how he would have wanted it finished ... The only bad part about it is we can't do it together."

I-490 ramps to close

As part of the Route 96 highway project in Bushnells Basin, the Interstate 490 interchange at Exit 27 (Route 96/Bushnells Basin) will be closed to all traffic for the weekend Friday, June 1 through Sunday, June 3. This includes all entrance and exit ramps in both directions. Detours will be posted. Traffic reports are posted at www.travelinfony.com.