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## Spanning History

By Matt McNabb/Zionsville Times Sentinel

When an arsonist destroyed the Bridgeton Covered Bridge in April of 2005, it took the residents of Bridgeton less than 48 hours to meet and decided they would rebuild the bridge.



The Beamery, A Zionsville company, has been working since April 2006 to rebuild the Parke County bridge, and it will be reopened in a ceremony on Sunday, Oct. 1, days before more than 2 million people will travel to Parke County for the annual Covered Bridge Festival.

The decision to rebuild and the work to get the bridge replaced has been a whirlwind of activity that started shortly after the bridge was burnt on April 28, 2005, said Bart Barnes, treasurer of the Bridgeton Covered Bridge Association.

Within 48 hours of the fire, there was a community meeting where 110 people got a chance to say what the bridge meant to them and then the group decided to rebuild the bridge, he said.

“The bridge had not stopped smoldering, and we were moving forward,” he said.

The effort to rebuild started immediately after the meeting, and donations came pouring in, he said.

“Seeing donations from \$30,000 by a corporation to watching kids empty piggy banks into donation buckets, it’s been really incredible,” Barnes said. “We had a lot of wonderful people from all over the United States either contribute or wish us well.”

In October of 2005, less than six months after the bridge burned, \$120,000 had been raised to build the bridge, he said.

Along with the financial contributions, hundreds of people donated thousands of hours of volunteer work, he said.

An architectural firm donated their services to engineer the bridge and a masonry company donated time and work to check the foundation of the bridge, he said.

David Watters, of The Beamery, said even the poplar logs used to rebuild the bridge were contributed by local landowners, and volunteers sawed the logs down to size.

Barnes said 126 poplar trees were used in the bridge, and although most came from local landowners, a few were donated out of the Indiana Department of Natural Resource's Greene-Sullivan State Forest.

Because of all the donated effort, the \$1.5 million bridge was built for less than \$230,000 in cash, he said.

Watters said he saw the coverage of the arson on television and he and The Beamery got involved when he started talking to his draftsman, who lived in the Bridgeton area, about who he might contact to provide his services.

"Being a Hoosier, it was a wonderful opportunity," he said.

The Beamery had never built a covered bridge before, but had been building timber frame structures for 20 years, and was started to strictly concentrate on timber frame and post and beam construction, he said.

"We were local enough and yet had the expertise," Watters said.



The Beamery started working on building the bridge in early April, and much of it was fabricated at the company's workshop in Fayette and then transported to Bridgeton, he said.

He said his crew has been living in Bridgeton since August to get the component's of the bridge in place and assembled by October for the dedication and the festival.

Barnes said this year's Covered Bridge Festival is the 50th annual, which was a motivating factor in getting the bridge done this year.

The new Bridgeton Covered Bridge uses two 122-foot spans joined together to cover the 245-

foot span, identical to the original Bridgeton bridge, Watters said.

The bridge is built following the Burr-Arch Truss style that J.J. Daniels used in the original Bridgeton bridge built in 1868, he said.

He said the decision to follow the original plans for the bridge were strength of design as well as aesthetic reasons.

“Not only for sake of keeping it looking the same, but it had been there since 1868 — If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” Watters said.

He said he has no plans in continuing in the covered bridge building business, but the Bridgeton Covered Bridge has been a great opportunity.

“It’s really been a great project in terms of community involvement and history,” he said.

