Historic restoration specialist hopes to return bandstand to its original splendor

BY DONNA RHODES

Belmont — Having grown up working with a father and grandfather who are renowned for their work on old covered bridges all across the United States, JR Graton is no stranger to the art of historic renovations.

Now owner of his own company, JR Graton Historic Restorations in Northfield, he has brought his talents to the Belmont Bandstand, where he is helping to bring back its original splendor.

“I started working on covered bridges over the summers and during school vacations back in 1968. Since that time, I’ve worked to restore a lot of churches, old barns and some homes, but this is my first bandstand,” said Graton.

Painting and a new roof are part of Phase 2 for Belmont’s bandstand restoration project, which was made possible through an LCHIP challenge grant and matching funds from the Belmont Heritage Commission. The goal is to restore as much of the original structure as possible and to have any necessary repairs recreated to look like the original.

When the bandstand was moved to its new location last spring, Graton was brought in to replace the lattice work and intricate railings on the 106-year-old structure. The railings, he said, had been replaced back in the “60s, but were done with a press board and not made like the original.

“We tore the old ones out, painted with red wood this time, and there were a lot of band saw cutouts I had to do, but it came out great. You don’t see decorative stuff like this done on porches and railings these days,” he said.

Once Graton finished with the wooden decor of the bandstand, John Thompson stepped in to paint the structure in its original colors of deep green and a rustic shade of red. Graton then turned in late August for the next step — the roof.

“The swooping roof really gives this bandstand character. It has some really neat features I don’t think it’s leaked, it’s just worn out,” Graton said.

For the past few weeks, he has been busy pulling the old wood shingles off so he can re-place them with the new ones he has been creating back at his workshop.

In all, Graton said he has more than 1,000 shingles of varying size to cut for the eight-sided roof. Besides the standard rectangular pieces, there are also a few rows of pointed, decorative shingles that he must hand cut as well. Once cut, each piece in hand dipped into the red paint that will bring back the original appearance and character of the bandstand.

As one other final touch on the project, an old granite slab will be placed at the bottom of the steps with the date “1908” etched into it, commemorating the year the bandstand was built.

Graton said he hopes to have the roof done in time for a special September 28 bandstand program that will celebrate its restoration.

“I usually do a lot of structural work, not decorative, so it’s really enjoyed this. The colors really make it pop and it’s probably the prettiest historic bandstand in the state. I’m glad I get to be a part of restoring it,” said Graton.