

Column bolsters Bok Kai

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Restoration efforts at Marysville's Bok Kai Temple got a lift Thursday afternoon as contractors put into place a redwood column purchased for the temple through a community fundraiser.

The column was one of several structures that will replace a wooden support system that is rotting away due to age and water damage.

Community leaders watched as the column was carefully put into place, calling it a milestone in the struggle to restore the Taoist temple, located at First and D streets. The temple, which honors the Chinese water god Bok Eye, was built by Chinese immigrants in 1880.



Mike Bordenkircher of the Hudspeth Corporation helps set a new column in place Thursday on the Bok Kai Temple in Marysville.

"I'd like to thank everybody who helped us raise money," said George Louie, the president of the Chinese Community Association Inc. "This is why we can keep the temple alive."

Financing for the columns was provided by the Marysville Rotary Club, which raised \$23,000 for Bok Kai restoration projects as part of its Centennial Project, according to past president David Tarke.

The donation, raised through a golf tournament honoring Rotary International's 100th birthday, is only a small fraction of the amount needed to save the temple, Tarke said.

Sanchita Balachandran, left, and Molly Lambert from Archatect Conservation Inc. of Berkeley work at touching up the murals that line the top of the Bok Kai temple Thursday.

"It's bigger than we can do," Tarke said. "We need a lot of people to join in with us."

Temple preservation advocates have estimated total restoration costs in the millions, according to Jean Chan, whose husband is the vice president of the Chinese Community Association Inc.

The column put into place on Thursday was one of two to be installed by the Hudspeth Corporation, which has undertaken restoration of the temple's entrance. Along with other reinforcements, company representative Lew Hudspeth said the columns will help support an aging portico that's marred with a widening crack.

The crack not only threatens the structure, but also paintings that date back to the building's construction.

"Over the years, it just disintegrated," Hudspeth said.

Also to be installed in the temple are two support beams. All of the wood beams used for the replacement pieces were made from 100-year-old wood, which was chosen for its strength and similarity to original building materials.

"It's very dry, and it won't be cracking," Hudspeth said.



Community leaders on hand at the temple on Thursday said the columns are an important step because they are the first visible signs of restoration. Donors may be more likely to give to restoration efforts now that they can see tangible results.

"This is a big step, but we'll have to do (fundraising efforts) at one step at a time," said Billie Single of the Marysville Friends of Bok Kai Temple.

John Walasek, tourism director for the Yuba-Sutter Chamber of Commerce, also said the addition will help local groups apply for grant funding for historical preservation in Marysville.

"Movement toward completing projects adds toward showcasing this area," Walasek said.

Chan said the new wood work may help restoration leaders secure donations from Bay Area Chinese American groups interested in the project.

A group of six Chinese American organizations recently donated an undisclosed amount that she said was a "considerable amount of money," but local leaders are pressing on with fundraising efforts, Chan said.

"I'm glad that we got this far, and I appreciate all the support of the community," said Gordon Tom, who grew up in Marysville's Chinatown and now works as a photographer and historian for the Marysville Friends of Bok Kai Temple.