

Putting a lid on Old Cap

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MARION -- Tom Barnes and his employees are about to put the lid on the Old Capitol dome in Iowa City.



Barnes, president of Barnes Manufacturing Co. of 560 31st St., Marion, and three of his employees on Wednesday will install a semi-circular aluminum door at the top of the landmark dome.

The \$25,000 "oculus cover," which looks like the lid of a spice container, will slide open to raise and lower the American and Iowa flags atop the dome.

The Old Capitol dome was destroyed by a Nov. 20, 2001, fire that caused an estimated \$5.6 million in damage.

"The original dome had a trap door that was visible from the ground," Barnes said. "This type of sliding door is something that could have been made in 1850 when the dome was originally constructed."

Barnes said his company was selected by Boston-based Einhorn Yafee Prescott Architecture & Engineering to fabricate the door after the firm viewed restoration work Barnes had done on the Iowa State University campanile in 1992.

"We did all the structural steel to stabilize the terra cotta that was about to fall," Barnes said. "I had photographs of our work and a file that I e-mailed to Boston."

The Old Capitol dome door is made of a sheet of aluminum that Hawkeye Metal Spinners of Jesup spun to curve the edge about 2 inches over the lip of the dome.

"We sent 22 pieces, including the door and the various brackets to hold it down, to a company in Minneapolis to have it anodized," Barnes said. "We had to make the pieces small enough to fit through the relatively small opening at the top of the dome for final installation."

Teflon strips allow the door to slide on a stainless steel track. Barnes Manufacturing built an exact replica of the dome to assure that the door would clear the fragile gold leaf on the dome's surface.

Although Barnes is an ISU graduate, he is pleased the company had a role in the restoration of Old Capitol.

"My wife, who is a graduate of the University of Iowa, was in tears the day of the fire," Barnes said. "This is a focal point of the college and a focal point of the state."

"While I don't like the circumstances that created this opportunity, it has really been a nifty project."