

Church on the Green to install a new organ

By Michael W. Curley Jr.
Staff Writer

The Bloomfield Presbyterian Church on the Green is getting a new pipe organ, replacing the current one which was installed in 1911.

Don Cornell, head of the committee to replace the organ, said the project has been in the planning for the last three years, as the 1911 Austin Organ was "on its last legs." The church is replacing everything but the pipes, and Cornell said the installation began Oct. 13.

When fully installed, he said, it will probably be the biggest pipe organ in Bloomfield. The committee was first organized to evaluate the organ's state, and determine what could be done to make it sound better. After about a year and a half, the committee decided in summer 2007 it would be better in the long run simply to replace it.

The old organ, Cornell said, was "falling apart," as the leather and wooden parts were deteriorating from old age. "It would have been a maintenance nightmare to keep it up." The church unanimously decided to replace the organ in October of that year, and has spent the last year working on getting it replaced.

The organ had been previously moved in 1970 when the church merged with the other local Presbyterian church, from one end of the building to the other, and in the process had to be "chopped up" in order to fit in its new place, changing the sound quality.

The installation, Cornell said, would take another five to six weeks, including four weeks to individually tune and voice each of the 2,869 pipes in the organ. This process has to be done with any organ installation, as the acoustic properties of a setting will determine how a pipe sounds, Cornell said.

Organist and director of music Tim Tarantino said the process, called “tonal finishing,” had to be done by hand, and was expensive, but it lasts.

The new organ is a three-manual, 48-rank organ, meaning it has three keyboards and a set of foot pedals, Tarantino said. The organ, Cornell said, was actually four different instruments, each with its own keyboard. The committee, he said, had discussed replacing each component one at a time over the next several years, but decided it was better to simply replace it all at once.

Tarantino, who’s been with the church as its music director since 2005, said the new organ would have a low profile, allowing him to see the choir while he’s playing, and would have a new facade, and case work in the balcony made of African mahogany. He added they were also taking the opportunity to redesign some of the tonal concepts of the instrument.

“The original sound was warm and romantic,” he said, “When they moved it in early 1970, they changed the tonal palette to a very baroque type of sound.” With the new organ, he said they’ve restored much of the original sound of the 1911 instrument, but also kept the sounds present in the 1970 reorganization. “We didn’t get rid of anything.”

The church is planning to have the new organ ready in time for Christmas, if not sooner. In the meantime, Tarantino has been using the piano, which he said was a lot of fun. The piano, he discovered, was a rebuilt concert grand piano from 1901 that the church got when the Second Presbyterian Church closed a few years ago.

The church is planning its dedication service on Jan. 11, and Cornell said they plan to have several recitals during the year, but haven’t set any dates yet. The dedication concert will be held Oct. 17, 2009, which is a special date, Cornell said, because the church’s first organ was dedicated in concert on Oct. 17, 1883, and the second organ was dedicated in concert on October 17, 1911.

“We’ve discovered this wonderful instrument, and we hadn’t been using it,” he said. He added it was “a thrill” to work on a project like installing a new organ, and to see people who value a good instrument and are willing to put the effort and funds together to sustain it in the future. “It’s a worthwhile investment,” he added.