

A Steeple for the Ages

by Ted Cushman

When a windstorm damaged the spire on his local Roman Catholic church, Taunton, Mass., design-builder Andy DiGiammo took on the challenge of restoring the structure.

Such a project is hardly unique in New England, says DiGiammo: Most of the area's towns — even small ones

— have several churches that may date back to the early 1800s, and the steeples often suffer from deterioration. “A lot of the old churches, the spire or the whole steeple is gone,” he says. “They’re complicated and expensive to maintain and repair, and church budgets are very limited these days. But you can’t just send the church handyman up there to take care of it.”

For the Taunton church, DiGiammo came up with a modern solution: replace the failed old wood spire with a faithful restoration crafted out of ¼-inch aluminum plate (1). “Fortunately, the main structure of the steeple, an oak timber frame, was in good condition,” says DiGiammo. “And we were able to find the original drawings from 1830 that showed the way the steeple had been built — at that time, as a Baptist church.” DiGiammo designed a replacement that combined the original crenellations from the Baptist church with the spire added by Catholics in the 1900s.

Sousa & DeMayo, a steel fabricator in nearby Attleboro Falls, helped construct the one-piece, self-supporting welded aluminum structure. “Steel would have been too

heavy,” says DiGiammo. “In aluminum, the total weight was only 1,500 pounds.” But it was still big, and transporting it to the church a major concern. “I was one inch lower than the overhead bridge restriction,” says DiGiammo. A local big-rig road-service company handled the trip.

Once the new spire was on site (2), setting it in place with a crane took only four hours, says DiGiammo — an afternoon’s work that he hopes will endure for a lifetime, and more (3).

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