



NEWS

North Fort Chapel moves to new home

By Don Kramer, Northwest Guardian

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It's not easy to pick up a building, especially one carrying 65 years of history.

The North Fort Chapel's two-mile move northward Saturday across the Dupont-Steilacoom Road began its transformation from a house of worship to an environmental training and conference center.

The 1941 structure, Building 3A38, was scheduled until last summer for demolition. By August it will be reborn as the Environmental Education and Conference Center (E2C2), forming the heart of an environmental preserve that has grown out of a 240-acre former landfill site now known as the Sequelitchew Training Center for Environmental Education and Earthworks.

The chapel renovation concept started as an afterthought among managers from the Fort Lewis Directorate of Public Works and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"Ken (Smith) and I ... were the ones who cooked this scheme up over lunch one day as a joke," said Elizabeth Chien of the Seattle District Corps of Engineers.

Smith, the Environmental Program manager in the DPW Environmental and Natural Resources Division, said an Armywide directive provided the impetus for the project. The guidance required that 50 percent of material generated by demolitions be recycled or diverted.

"We started walking around this (chapel) to see what was salvageable on it," Smith said. "I fell in love with it when I walked inside. It's amazing the stories this building holds. If the building could only talk; think of the weddings performed here, the baptisms. We're trying to save some of that."

Smith and Chien agreed that the chapel was structurally superior to the modular buildings the Army was buying to house similar facilities.

"They're stacking portables to make these two-story things when structurally, this is better than two modulars stacked on top of each other," Chien said.

Some out-of-the-box thinking solved the financial challenges of the project. The Construction Engineer Research Laboratory funded the project as an Army corrosion program.



Jason Kaye

Workers from Northwest Structural Moving watch as an old North Fort Chapel is moved down a hill during the relocation of the building to the other side of the DuPont-Steilacoom Road.

“My interest at CERL is to develop methods and policies using resources to fulfill the mission rather than throw them away,” said research architect Thomas Napier. “We incorporated in the design high-durability materials for siding and roofing, recycled products, innovative durable (materials) with long service life to reduce the maintenance tail. This is a showcase facility.”

Napier said 25,000 pounds of shingles were recycled in the project while hazardous materials were removed. Asbestos from the interior and siding covered in lead-based paint were stripped under the supervision of prime contractor, MCS Environmental, Inc.

“We had to take care of the roof and siding,” said Chien. “We had to pretty much gut the interior. So there was some demolition and removal of hazardous material that took place.”

Designer Mike Iacono of Custom Fine Design, a subcontractor to MCS, said a structural assessment pronounced the building fit to move. It was then wrapped to keep it dry.

“Then, in layman’s terms, you poke holes, insert I-beams and lift (it onto wheels),” Iacono said.

“It’s probably as solid right there braced up inside as it was sitting on the ground,” said MCS contractor Russ Morrison, studying the chapel prior to the move.

Months of planning and five days of preparation culminated Saturday in the final move of the building from its moorings at the edge of North Fort.

“They’ve been digging the hole for the foundation, taking fences down, coordinating for communication and power lines en route, removing some trees and obstacles,” said Smith.

A subcontractor, Northwest Structural Moving, hauled the building under the supervision of MCS, DPW and the Corps of Engineers. By 8:15 a.m., the building eased northward toward 32nd Division Drive, turned east to Seventh Street, then north to its new home.

“This has been a challenge since Day 1,” said Smith. “It is not what the Army does normally. It has been outside the normal way we do business.” “Nor the Corps of Engineers,” Chien said.

Both engineers said they hoped the chapel project would serve as a pilot for future renovations of structurally sound buildings that, after abatement and hazardous material removal, will be superior to current construction alternatives.

“We’re working with the Army at the highest levels and the corps at the highest levels,” Chien said.

“This is one of those projects I just feel good about,” said Smith. “It’s beyond compliance. We’re really thinking of the future here, because this building will be here for a long time.”

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