Maine experts to restore landmark Baltimore clock

BY SCOTT DANCE THE BALTIMORE SUN

The hands of the clock atop Baltimore's landmark Bromo Seltzer tower moved for the first time in nearly two years Monday — right off the timepiece's faces.

A crew of clockwork experts shimmied the wooden pointers off their shafts and lowered them, using a system of ropes and straps, through small windows in the middle of the clock's four faces.

A failed motor had left the hands stuck, correct only twice a day, at 9 o'clock.

But the massive timekeeper won't be impotent for long. The removal of the clock hands was the first step in a \$1.8 million restoration expected to be completed by next summer. Over the next few days, the clock's gears and weights will be removed, packed and shipped away to be refurbished. While the clock's away, crews will repair cracks in the 289-foot tower's cupola and repaint the name of the once-popular antacid on its facade.

When it's reinstalled, the clock once again will be powered by gravity with a swinging pendulum, instead of the silent electric motor installed years ago. That means the clock will tick audibly for the first time in

But the weathered hands removed Monday won't tell the time again. Each clock

face will get a new set, made from California redwood.

"Hands, they're like a sacrificial part of a clock. They just don't last forever," said Linda Balzer of Balzer Family Clock Works, the Freeport, Maine-based experts hired for the restoration. "It's like tires on a car."

The Baltimore Office of Promotion & the Arts, which manages the city-owned tower, has been looking to repair the clock for years, said Annie Applegarth, the organization's director of facility operations. Its southern face became notoriously unreliable in 2007, and after repairs in 2010, all seemed

But problems continued. Hands would stick, and the clock's electric motor would continue turning its gears anyway, causing parts to break, said Tony Azola, whose company, Azola & Associates, performed renovations that opened the tower as artist studio space in 2007. The motor has powered the clock since its original pendulum system was removed at least 40 years

To prevent further damage, the motor was turned off in January 2014, and the clock's gears and hands have been motionless since, Applegarth said. With a \$40,000 repair tab this time around, restoration became the best option, she said.

A \$500,000 city bond and grants from organizations including the Middendorf

The Bromo-Seltzer Tower in Baltimore, Maryland, was erected in 1911.

Foundation and the Baltimore National Heritage Area paid the expenses of launching the clock restoration, Applegarth said. The city arts agency meanwhile launched a campaign called 'Start the Clock! Bromo Tower Restoration Fund" on

the crowd-funding website Indiegogo, seeking to raise

According to the campaign, Baltimore officials promised to preserve the tower when it was donated to the city by Isaac Emerson, the chemist who in-

vented Bromo Seltzer in his West Baltimore pharmacy. The tower was built in 1911 to resemble the tower at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, Italy, a beacon for the downtown factory where Emerson's popular headache remedy was produced.

Prominent Connecticut clockmaker Seth Thomas Co. built the tower's focal point clock for about \$4,000 just over \$100,000 today.

As part of the project, Balzer Family Clock Works will tune up the clock's gears and restore its pendulum, the weight that swings with gravity to power the timepiece. The company also will build a new escapement, a device long missing from the clock, which regulates its motion, keeping the clock on time and producing the familiar tick-tock sound.

When it comes to clockworks, "gravity is the top of the line — the creme de la creme, so to speak," Balzer

The company also will build the new clock hands. It's not clear how long the hands removed Monday spent out in the elements, Balzer said. The minute hands are each 13 feet long and weigh 175 pounds, while the hour hands are 9 feet long and weigh 125 pounds.

While the clock is being restored in Maine, Azola & Associates will replace rusted and missing segments of the clock's 25-foot-

wide cast-iron dials, repair broken glass and repaint each face.

Perhaps more important than the clock repairs, Azola crews also will fix brick around and above the clock. The tower cupola has been cracked and worn since the tower's early days. When it opened, a 51-foot rotating and illuminated Seltzer bottle weighed on the structure. It was removed in 1936 to prevent further damage.

The browned brick will be repointed and cleaned, restoring it to its original tan color, Azola said.

In the meantime, the tower will remain open for tours. On its 15th floor and in the clock room above, the city arts agency is installing a museum of Bromo Seltzer memorabilia collected over the past 40 years by Ernie Dimler, a Pasadena resident and antique bottle collector.

The exhibit will include artifacts relating to other Emerson ventures, such as the Emerson Hotel, and to his former estate, Brookland Wood, which is now the campus of St. Paul's School, Dimler said.

After all, it is Emerson's pharmaceutical fortune that put the tower, and its clock, at the corner of Eutaw and Lombard streets.

'It's an odd thing to have in the middle of a city like this," Azola said. "It's definitely an engineering mar-

Alton church plans craft fair, luncheon

ALTON — The Alton United Methodist Women will hold a craft fair and luncheon 10 a.m.-2 p.m Saturday, Oct. 17, at Alton United Methodist Church, 3494 Bennoch Road.

Crafts, including Linwood Randall's wood crafts and the Marine Corps' Auxiliary crafts, plus white elephant items and baked goods will be offered for sale.

other events, visit watervillecreates.org

The cost of the luncheon, featuring haddock chowder, gingerbread and whipped cream and a drink, will be

Library to host its grand reopening

MILLINOCKET Friends of The Millinocket Memorial Library will celebrate the grand reopening of the library 10 a.m.- 5 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 14.

Light refreshments will

preschool through grade two will be eligible to enter a

spooky coloring contest. For information, call 723-

Public supper at **Bucksport church**

BUCKSPORT — A public supper will be held 5-6 p.m Saturday, Oct. 17, at Elm Congregational Church, 31 Elm St.

The supper will have

be available. Children in homemade casseroles, salads, baked beans and pies.

Admission is \$7 for adults, \$5 for ages 5-10, free for children under 5.

Baked bean supper Oct. 17 in Dedham

DEDHAM — A baked bean supper will be held 5-6:30 p.m Saturday, Oct. 17, at Dedham Church, Route

baked beans, coleslaw, pota- Thursday, Oct. 14-15, as

to salad, hot dogs, rolls, brown bread, beverages and

The cost is \$8 for adults, \$4 for children.

Pittsfield street to be closed Oct 13-15

PITTSFIELD town of Pittsfield wishes to notify the public that the Industrial Park Street crossing will be closed to The menu will included traffic Wednesday and

Pan Am Railways rehabilitates the crossing.

Only local traffic will be allowed on Industrial Park Street. All through traffic must use Somerset Avenue aor Main Street (Route 100). To access the opposite side of the Industrial Park Street crossing, traffic must take another route.

The designated truck route cannot be used by truck traffic. For information about the project, call the Pittsfield town office at





Enter to win a \$50 Gift Certificate from Mid Maine Chamber!





Meet The BIN at Aroma Joes Waterville

84 Kennedy Memorial Dr., • October 23rd • 8am-11am

Get a FREE PAPER and a FREE 16 oz COFFEE!