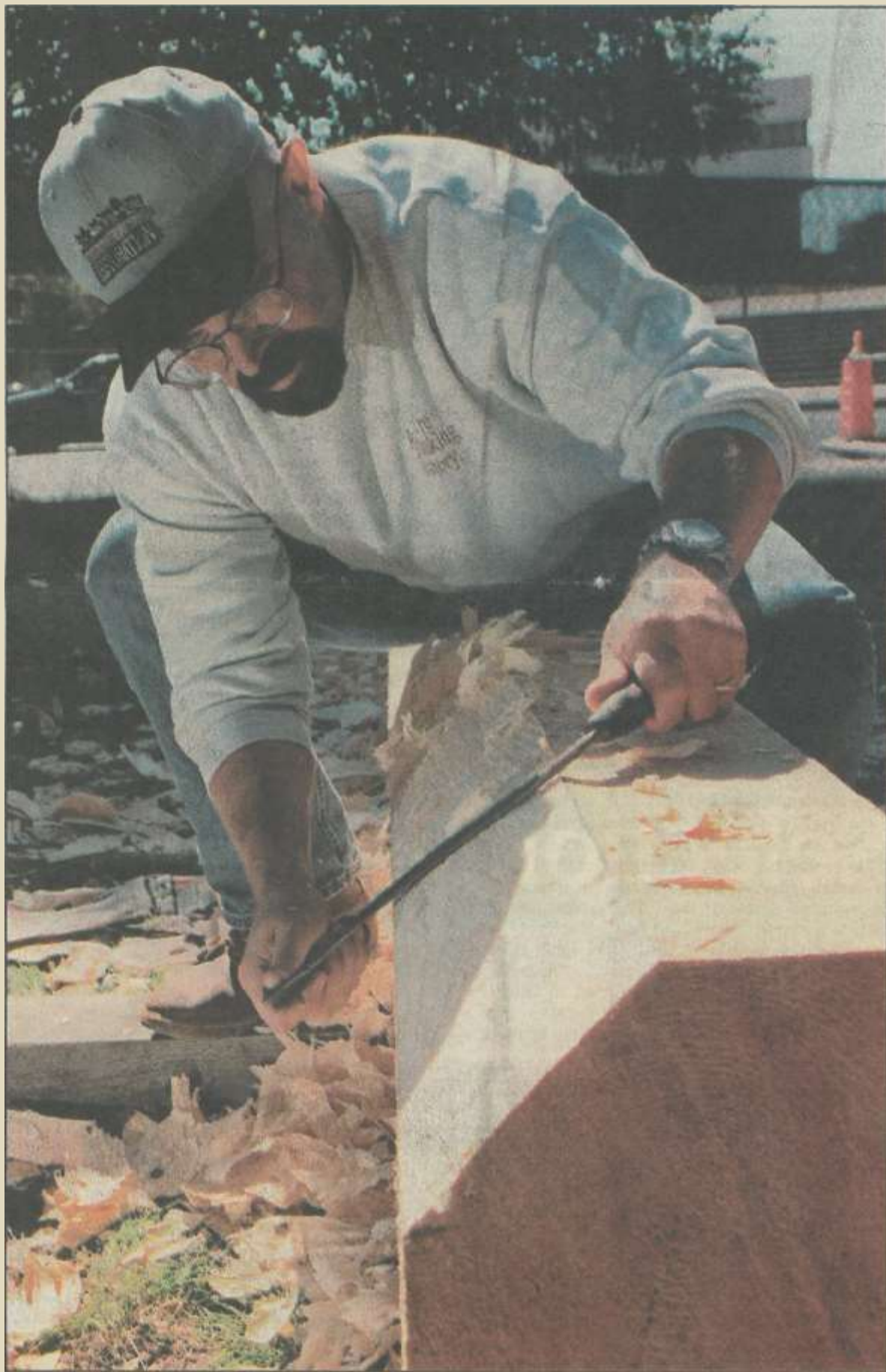


CARVING A PIECE OF HISTORY



KATHY HANLEY / THE HARTFORD COURANT

THOMAS J. KRONENBERGER JR. of Kronenberger & Sons Restoration Inc. of Middletown uses a "draw knife" to hand-carve the wood that will replace a rotted section of the spire at Hartford's Center Church on Main Street.

From Simple Wood To Sacred Spire

Center Church Steeple Section To Be Replaced

By **JOSEPH ROCHA**
Courant Staff Writer

When does a piece of wood become history? When the state is scoured for a tree of the same age as a 150-year-old church spire it will replace. When you employ some of the same centuries-old tools and time-honored techniques to size and carve the wood as were used when the church was built. When initials notched into the wood of generations past give way to those

for generations to come.

This morning, weather permitting, another step in the conversion of simple wood into sacred spire takes place when a portion of Main Street at Gold Street in Hartford is cordoned off. A crane will hoist the 20-foot new section of the spire into place atop Center Church between 7 am. and noon.

"It's not every day you get to carve a piece of wood like this, a piece of history," said Don Moore, who operates the fifth-generation Bloomfield sawmill where the wood was sized last month before being shipped downtown.

Center Church, also known as First Church of Christ Congregational, is one of several city houses of worship under renovation. But it is probably unique in replacing its "mast," said William Deuschle, project manager for

Kronenberger & Sons, which is overseeing the work.

The original spire, which was hoisted in much the same way a ship's mast was installed, had been damaged by rain. In the end, the top 20 feet of the 40-foot spire, which reaches six stories, will require replacing.

"It followed the heartwood," Deuschle said of the rot. "It was pretty severe."

"You could just reach down and pull [the rotten wood] out," said Thomas J. Kronenberger Jr., of the company. "It was like grabbing sawdust."

Kronenberger said church elders could have opted to use fiberglass for a modern replacement of either the entire spire or the rotted portion.

"Because of the historic nature of

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Church

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this church, our recommendation was to replace what was there," Kronenberger said.

The company put out a call through its network of lumber subcontractors for an Eastern white pine tree close to the spire wood's 150 years. A 125-year-old tree was found in Riverton.

"I needed something with a big butt," Kronenberger said. "This was about 22 inches in diameter at the base."

The tree trunk was cut and transported to Moore's Sawmill. The raw wood was trimmed to 16 inches in diameter and later hand-hewn to 10 inches in diameter. "We've done towers before," Deuschle said. "This was an unusual situation. It changed the whole process."

The new top to the spire is part of a five-month, \$700,000 job to remove lead and repaint, repair carpentry and masonry and bring sections of the church up to code, while updating the electrical system and adding a security system. A

\$500,000 phase next summer will concentrate indoors on repairing walls, repainting and carrying out other less significant restoration, said Kronenberger, whose firm is overseeing the project.

A footing of the new section will be set into a hollowed-out section of the existing spire. Workers have im-

provised clamping using some of the original hand-wrought iron spikes to fashion a collar that will hold the new mast in place. The clamps, Kronenberger said, will allow "the give" necessary for the steeple to weather wind and storms.

"We are putting back much of the original material," Kronenberger

said. "This gets a lead-coated copper sheeting."

"It's almost like a paraffin," Deuschle said, and acts like flashing at the steeple's base.

After installation, workers will reattach hand-hammered metal ornaments and a new weathervane of the same raw pine.

Officer Suspended For Dealing With Loan Shark

Associated Press

NEW HAVEN — A police officer who did business with a Branford loan shark who charged him an annual interest rate of 150 percent on a \$6,000 loan has been suspended for six months.

Officer Dan Picagli was suspended Thursday. The Board of Police Commissioners handed down the suspension after Picagli pleaded guilty earlier in the week to violating three internal police policies and offered an apology.

"He did the right thing in immediately admitting what he did and cooperating with internal affairs," said Commissioner Jonathan J.

Einhorn.

Police Chief Melvin H. Wearing called the suspension fair. "He was suspended for six months without pay. The board has spoken and the chief concurs," Wearing said.

Picagli, a school resource officer at Fair Haven Middle School, pleaded guilty on Tuesday to internal charges of associating with "hoodlums, criminals or other unsavory characters," failure to report criminal activity to a supervisor and committing an act contrary to discipline in the police department.

Picagli is a 10-year veteran of the police department. Authorities

said he took out \$6,000 in loans, and other family members took out another \$4,000. He reportedly spent the money on auto repairs, a gambling trip to Las Vegas and medical care for his ailing mother.

Last fall, Branford detectives broke up the loan-sharking operation, which had 378 clients and a loan portfolio of more than \$1 million.

The operation charged between 1.5 percent and 5 percent interest weekly. Picagli paid 3 percent weekly. At that rate, a customer with \$1,000 debt must pay \$1,560 a year in interest.