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Scaffolding Shrouds Travelers Tower For \$30M Face-Lift

Workers Replacing Windows And Drainpipes, Repairing Masonry, Removing Rust



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For New York, it's the **Empire State Building**. For Philadelphia, it's city hall.
 For Hartford, the landmark of the cityscape is Travelers Tower, though it may be a little harder to recognize these days encased in a latticework of scaffolding.
 The 527-foot-tall tower, with 34 floors, is getting a face-lift at a cost of \$30 million.

Workers are repairing chips and cracks on the masonry façade and replacing the mortar joints between the bricks. They are stripping the cast-iron exterior window trimmings that have rusted over time and painting them to match the windows.

The tower will look brighter and cleaner after the project, restoring the decorative moldings and bringing back the pinkish glow that's been dulled by time and harsh weather.

"It's always been iconic to Hartford, and iconic in the world, and it's always been associated with Travelers," said Andy Bessette, chief administrative officer and executive vice president of The Travelers Cos.

The company is replacing 2,000 windows installed in the early 1990s with ones that are more energy efficient. It is also replacing drainage pipes that are clogged by sludge that has built up for decades.

The Hartford office of Consigli Construction, based in Milford, Mass., is the general contractor on the project. The company has worked on landmark restoration projects at the **Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum of Art** and on renovations at Harvard University. It has 50 to 70 employees working on the tower each day.

Perkins Eastman is the design firm and Building Conservation Associates is the historic preservation consultant.

Construction of the 920 feet of scaffolding — from the top of the base building to the top of the tower — started in June 2012 and will be completed at the end of this month.

The original Travelers building, designed by Donn Barber in a neoclassical style, was constructed in 1907. The tower was added in 1919, making the building the seventh tallest in the world at that time.

Because of its height, the building is required by the **Federal Aviation Administration** to have a flashing red light to warn aircraft, in addition to the white beacon lights used for illumination. The light changes to blue for University of Connecticut basketball championships, and red during the Travelers Championship.

In the 1960s, before traffic reports were done via helicopter, a state police officer would be stationed at the top of the tower with binoculars and a radio to broadcast live traffic reports for I-91 and I-84, said Mary Falvey, senior program associate for the Hartford Preservation Alliance.

"It's certainly been an anchor for downtown," she said.

The tower was also known recently as the home to peregrine falcons, a threatened species in the state, that chose the 21st floor as their nesting ground. Until 2012, a webcam broadcast the nesting and rearing of the falcons' chicks.

The nesting box has been moved to the top of one of the other buildings in the complex, said Ashley Maagero, spokesperson for Travelers. The falcons continue to be active in the area, although there have been no hatchlings during the project, Maagero said.

The project started in late 2011 after a routine assessment of the building showed multiple repairs were needed.

Although the restoration was originally scheduled to end in the first or second quarter of 2015, it has been pushed back to the third quarter.

"The rain in May and June, it really put a damper — so to speak — on what we were trying to do," Bessette said. "Weather's been the biggest challenge."

The work spaces of the building have remained open during the project. The observation deck, an exterior balcony area on the 27th floor for visitors, is closed during the construction.

"Everybody will be proud of the way it looks when we're done," Bessette said. The cast-iron work, he said, "is going to be pretty spectacular and bring a highlight to the side of the building."

The company employs 7,800 people in Connecticut, with the majority in Hartford.

Falvey, from the Hartford Preservation Alliance, said: "We're absolutely thrilled with the work they're doing. It's been around about 100 years, and it's great to see it's going to go on for another hundred."

After the tower restoration is completed, Travelers will begin renovation on its plaza in connection with the city's iQuilt program. The renovation will include removing the planters, which are leaking into the garage below, to create a flat, open space.