

St. Regis Mountain fire tower open, but work still needs to be done

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From left, Bob Marrone, Doug Fitzgerald, Scottie Adams, Janelle Hoh, David Petrelli and Richard LaBombard pose at the Saranac Laboratory Museum Monday night after a public informational meeting on the status of the St. Regis Mountain fire tower. (Enterprise photo — Justin A. Levine)

SARANAC LAKE — Last fall, the fire tower on the summit of St. Regis Mountain in Paul Smiths opened to the public for the first time in 26 years, thanks to the efforts of a dedicated group of people.

Friends of St. Regis Mountain Fire Tower is an all-volunteer nonprofit group that has worked with the state Department of Environmental Conservation over the last several years to restore the 99-year-old tower.

In less than two years, the group installed a new roof, stairs, landings, railings and safety measures that allowed it to remove the “*closed*” sign and open the tower to those willing to climb it.

But despite the rapid progress in restoration, organizers say there is still work to be done.

“(It took) 14 months from nothing to open to the public,” Co-Chair Doug Fitzgerald said during the meeting. *“My biggest regret is that now most people think our work is done, and it’s not.”*

Fitzgerald said that most of the diagonal braces that provide stability to the tower need to be replaced, and due to the age of the tower, each piece has to be custom fabricated. Fitzgerald said local builder David Vana could do the work, but the group needs to raise the money for the project. Vana has worked on restoring numerous fire towers and mentioned he will work on the closed Wakely Mountain fire tower soon. He also fabricated and installed the new roof on the St. Regis tower last year.

The group is also working with the Paul Smith’s College Visitor Interpretive Center to possibly create a display there. The friends group has in its possession numerous artifacts from when the tower was a working fire lookout, including the old radio and original map table, and would like to have a secure place to display the items.

The group also thinks a display at the VIC could entice more people to climb the mountain or offer an alternative to those who can’t.

“Not everyone can climb the mountain,” Treasurer Scottie Adams said. *“We’re thinking of a replica of the cab at the VIC for those who can’t climb.”*

There is also a steward from the college’s Adirondack Watershed Institute at the summit one day per week, and the group is looking for volunteers to staff the summit on other days.

“We’re looking for help; that’s the plain and simple of it,” Fitzgerald said.

For more information on the tower or ways to volunteer, go to www.friendsofstregis.org.