

NewsWatch

ture, and once they start leaking, the wood starts rotting or there's a fire in the hay."

Post-and-beam construction of the old barns used wooden pegs to allow the joinery to contract and swell equally with humidity and temperature changes.

"These barns last a long time if they are taken care of properly," Thomas says. "I call them an endangered species of architecture, and they are coming down at an alarming rate."

Thomas and Creyts are both involved with the Michigan Barn Preservation Network and have their own historic barns to maintain. The decision to preserve an old or historic barn is often an expensive one. Thomas explains that when she and her husband bought their farm, both the barn and the house needed new roofs.

"They both leaked," Thomas says. "But we fixed the barn roof first and lived with the leaks in the house just a little longer."

Creyts is about to put a new roof on his own historic barn in Eaton County's Delta Township. The house he and his family live in has a cornerstone dated 1886, and he has photographs of the house right after it was built. He believes the barn was constructed a few years later.

"There is often some real sentimental value in that structure, and they want to preserve a piece of their family history," Creyts says.

Possible money-makers

While expensive to maintain, historic barns also can be lucrative. The Ellis barn is used now for hosting events, primarily weddings, according to Brandy K. Boyd, an Oakland County Parks project adviser.

For \$2,000, a wedding party can rent the entire barn for a full weekend to allow for decorating, rehearsal and cleanup. The structure is not heated or air conditioned, nor is it ADA accessible. Despite these limitations, nearly every weekend available is filled through next year, Boyd says.

The structure is also used for exhibits during the Oakland County Fair and hosts a number of antique and craft shows.

In talking about old barns, Creyts says, people are "limited only by the limit of your imagination," Creyts says. "There are all kinds of commercial uses — microbreweries, meeting rooms, museums, retail shops."

People need to be careful about checking with zoning laws and complying with safety requirements, Creyts cautions.

For example, the Ellis Barn has a three-year zoning variance, and a lift or an elevator would have to be installed to make it fully accessible. Also, without a fire suppression system, no open flame is allowed as part of the decorations, Boyd says.

Creyts urged anyone with an old barn to ask questions and look at the resources available on the Barn Preservation Network's website, mibarn.net.

"There are a lot of people out there who do just this kind of work," he says. "You're never out there on an island all by yourself. Talk to someone who has done it before, and you'll find it really can be done."

Gehoski Steinman writes from Holt.

Resources

CHECK OUT mibarn.net/Resources.htm for a comprehensive list and links to grant information.



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Conference and barn tour

THE 2014 Fall Conference and Barn Tour is Oct. 11. It's a self-driving tour and will include the Thumb Octagon Barn and the Purdy House, a previous Barn of the Year owned by the Hecht family, and Kathy Thomas' double gambrel barn on her horse farm. More information is at www.mibarn.net.