

member spotlight



>> Left, Frank Schmechel's crew on break in Lake City, CO.

Below, the crew rebuilds windows, roof and decks at Interlaken Resort at Twin Lakes, CO. Frank Schmechel is at the saw with Minnesota DNR volunteer Peter Buessler. Local 1146 member Stephanie Fahringer is pictured working on column trim in the background.



Frank Schmechel: Experienced team heads up volunteer projects

Each summer, Frank Schmechel, retired member of Local 1146, gathers other retired Local 1146 members, as well as friends and family, and travels to places like North Carolina, Wyoming and Colorado to restore and preserve historic structures in National Parks and Forests across the country. Utilizing his skills and knowledge from 34 years in the field, Frank and his team spend two weeks each summer at different sites across the United States, camping and volunteering their time. Frank's team includes Lyle Bonlander, Stephanie Fahringer, Tom Leick, Tom VanBeek and Paul Hickey.

This tradition began with a partnership years ago with a nonprofit that organizes groups to restore buildings and structures on federal land. After working with this group, Frank began coordinating separate trips with a Regional Archeologist for the Park Service, allowing the work to be stretched out for a longer period of time. He and his friends began traveling across the country on their own trips, provided with RVs and campers, to support long-term restoration efforts. Many times, the crew visits remote areas without electricity or water.

Their most recent project, in Summer 2014, was in Encampment, Wy. A historic fire tower there was recently moved to a museum and Frank's team helped restore it. Many of the fire towers in the United States were built in the early 1900s and states are celebrating their fire tower centennials with restoration efforts. Much more work needs to be done and Frank said they may have to make Wyoming their destination again to continue the work.

Projects have ranged from farmsteads to historic resorts to log cabins. One of the sites Frank said he found most interesting was an historic train barn near Eureka, Calif. The barn, previously used for logging, was to be moved closer to town to become an interpretive center. Because of its location, 25 miles into the mountains, pieces of the building that were able to be saved were zip-lined through the forest to its new location. Carpenters saved one truss from the roof as a pattern and rebuilt trusses for the entire structure, using redwood to keep the building historically accurate.

One challenge with a project like this, Frank said, is to rebuild the structure to

be earthquake proof and up to code while piecing it together as originally built. Because structures like this are often listed as historic, there are many guidelines to follow.

Other projects Frank has undertaken include an alpine guard station in Lake City, Colo., an historic cabin on an elk reserve in Jackson Hole, Wy., a resort at Interlaken, Colo., an old farmstead in North Carolina that was once a stop on the Underground Railroad, and a barn at a dude ranch in Meeteetse, Wy., where Amelia Earhart spent time.

Frank was both Vice President and President of his Local and also worked as a Business Representative for 10 years. His father was a carpenter in Local 1146 and the reason Frank was inspired to become a carpenter. He continues his volunteering closer to home by assisting with renovations at a nearby food pantry, as well as annual Rebuilding Together projects. He says the reason these annual trips work is the crew that goes with him: they enjoy the projects, each other's company and the opportunity to use their carpentry knowledge to give back. 