

OPWC pays toll for shortest covered bridge

shortest covered bridge, Jim Pearson, shortest

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GENEVA — Ashtabula County will soon have the long of it and the short of it.

The nation's shortest covered bridge will be built in Geneva, with the balance of the \$400,000 price tag paid by the Ohio Public Works Commission, Geneva City Manager Jim Pearson said.

"We are still waiting on some details, but right now it looks like the project is 100 percent funded and we couldn't be more excited," he said.

On Aug. 26, Ashtabula County will unveil the longest covered bridge in the nation, so the addition of the shortest covered bridge is especially timely, Pearson said.

The 18-foot covered bridge will replace the crumbling West Liberty Street bridge within eyeshot of Route 534. This West Liberty Covered Bridge will be Ashtabula County's 18th timber covered bridge. Plans include foot paths on either side of the structure and a "toll booth" like building to hold tourist information about the bridge and the city, Pearson said.

To save money and further involve the community in the project, Ashtabula County Joint Vocational School carpentry students will construct the small structure, Pearson said.

ACJVS Superintendent Dr. Jerome Brockway said he is excited for Geneva and for the students working on the project.

The students will begin work in the 2009-2010 school year.

Funding for the little bridge came through a OPWC grant that required the city to take "a minimal loan at 0 percent interest as an Issue I project," Pearson said.

"The situation is that if not for this covered bridge, the city would have had to replace the bridge with concrete decking which would have cost as much or more than the covered bridge," Pearson said. "Now we will have a big economic driver to bring people to Geneva, to eat in our restaurants and shop in our stores."

The West Liberty Street Bridge has been in sad shape for a number of years and was recently declared a hazard after a yearly inspection, Pearson said.

Pearson calls the shortest covered bridge the "cornerstone" of the revitalization plan, which includes the rehabilitation of Cowles Creek from West Liberty Street to South Broadway and the construction of a cast iron welcome to "Historic Geneva" sign that will arch over Route 534, just after the railroad tracks at the Old Mill Winery, Pearson said.

New, antique-style street lamps will light the east and west sides of North Broadway. The Civil War Monument will again be moved to a spot near the center of town on South Broadway.

Pearson said the skill of Smolen Engineering and the goal of completing Geneva's new comprehensive plan fueled the idea.

"The more we talk about it, the more we work on it, the more we realize that this bridge is the right thing to do," he said.