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Altamont Enterprise — Jim Gardner

Working carefully, the last rafters are removed from this Stitts Road Dutch barn. The building is being moved to Route 20.

## Dutch barns to be restored

By Chris Sanford

GUILDERLAND — Parts of three Dutch barns will be restored and adapted to provide new office space for a local engineering firm in town.

Besha Associates Engineering Corporation is relocating its offices from New Karner Road to the Van Patten farm site on Western Avenue.

The existing structure will be restored and with two other barns, one from a Stitt Road site and the other from a Berne

location, will be re-erected and adapted to accommodate the office space.

The barns were built around the turn of the 19th century, according to Jim Besha. "We're trying to preserve them so they'll be here in another 200 years," he said.

Mark Hesler, a trustee and founding member of the Dutch Barn Preservation Society, has some reservations about the project.

"We are opposed to moving the barns off of their original site, because they lose their historic value when you take them off site," said Hesler.

"We semi-support the plan, but with certain qualifications and other alternatives," he added.

In a position paper sent to Besha and the Town Board the society proposed leaving the Van Patten farm in tact at its original site in its original form.

The barn is the only Dutch Barn in Guilderland on the National Historical Register, though that doesn't exempt it from sale for commercial use.

Hesler does acknowledge, however, that it is better to have barns that are in danger of complete ruin and loss be restored and adapted for other use than to be lost completely as is the case with the Stitt road barn.

"The Stitt Road barn was in danger. No question that there is some merit to Besha moving it," he added.

The barn type, known as New World Dutch, is unique to the Hudson Valley, eastern region of the Mohawk Valley and Schoharie County.

"They are a representation of our Dutch heritage, and are the truest example of American agricultural architecture," said Hesler.

Besha said, "By making them into something that has value, we can ensure that they'll be used in the future."

The new world structures are adaptations of those built by the Dutch before crossing the Atlantic and are characterized by 60 foot pieces of timber from virgin forests and steeply pitched roofs that lend a cathedral like look to the inside of the barn.

The structures are very utilitarian, and, though they have no superfluous details, the craftsmanship is beautiful. They are elegant in their simplicity and usefulness, said Besha.

There are approximately 300

to 400 Dutch Barns left in the U.S., 25 to 30 of them are in Guilderland which is the highest concentration of Dutch barns in the country.

Hesler is trying to guard against a trend of perfectly good barns being relocated and adapted for use other than what they were intended for.

Shirley Dunn, past president of the Dutch Barn Preservation Society said, "We'd be more willing to accept moving a barn and using it as a barn somewhere else as the old farmers used to do. They are not Dutch barns any longer when you adapt them for other use."

Hesler concedes that the barns are not readily adaptable for today's commercial dairy farms, though they have been adapted for such use. He said that they are good for live stock and storage of farm equipment and hay.

The restoration work will be done by specialized craftsmen during the winter months and the actual rebuilding will start around next April.

Besha Associates Engineering Corporation specializes in designing water supplies and hydro-electric plants for municipalities around the country.

"We are an innovative firm, and we feel our engineering office should be reflective of that," said Besha.

## Trip to Martinique

VOORHEESVILLE — Students in grades 9 through 12 are invited to sign up for a spring break trip from April 7 through 14, to the French island of Martinique. The trip will be led by Marguerite Montuori, an experienced traveler and teacher of French in Voorheesville.

Reservations are for triple occupancy rooms in a hotel with pool and beach, all breakfasts and four dinners. There are also several options for teacher-led sightseeing tours which include a pre-Colombian art museum, the Schoelcher Library, the Saint-Louis Roman Catholic Cathedral built in 1875, Trois-Ilets, birthplace of Empress Josephine and to the museum of La Pagerie which contains relics of Josephine's childhood.

Adults are welcome to come along but only after all students have had an opportunity to sign up. For more information call 456-1788.

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