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## St. Mary's restores pipe organ

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MEDINA — St. Mary's Church in Medina may one day soon play music the same way they did in the early 20th century. Working to rebuild their pipe organ, a small group has been taking steps to bring the "king of instruments" back to life.

The original organ was installed in the church in 1913 by the Tellers-Sommerhof Organ Company. According to church member Chris Busch, the organ fell into disrepair in the 1960s. He said that the church decided not to fix it and bought an electric organ that they have used for the past 40 years. Over the years, many of the sets of pipes were taken from the church and now are part of other church organs around Western New York and in privately owned home organs.

Busch said that 10 years ago, he began to look into rebuilding the organ, and that was when he met Aaron Grabowski. The current music director/organist for St. Mary's, Grabowski came and gave an assessment to determine if the pipe organ could be rebuilt. Having a bachelor's degree in organ performance and apprenticing with a small organ building company while in college, Grabowski said he has always had an interest in working on pipe organs.

Even though only a few original pipes remained at St. Mary's, including the facade, the chests that the pipes sit on still remained, and Grabowski determined that the organ could be rebuilt. He even had a Barckhoff organ that was removed from Annunciation Roman Catholic Church in Buffalo that he was waiting to find the perfect "marriage" for. He said that when he saw St. Mary's, he knew that was where it belonged.

"The organ is almost a perfect fit for this place," Grabowski said. Several years went by, and after Grabowski became music director in December 2007, he said he started to voluntarily put the organ in. The organ began playing a year ago, and currently, a sixth of what will be installed is playing.

"From this point forwards, we're looking for volunteer help to get this off the ground," Grabowski said. "Our ultimate goal is to make this a truly voluntary project, not just in the church but the community. I think the whole community will benefit."

Grabowski said he is looking for woodworkers, electricians and anyone willing to donate time to help in this restoration. They are also looking for anyone willing to be a financial backer. Grabowski and Busch have a goal to make this project about the community. They would like to hold music programs, such as bringing the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra back to play a concert featuring the organ. All concerts will be held for the community to enjoy.

"This will be a unique instrument for the area, especially in a building of this kind of stature and architecture," Grabowski said. "When you listen to it, you can actually feel it hit your chest. The sound waves are moving tons and tons of air. It's just amazing."

Once completed, the new organ will have 31 ranks of pipes, compared the 24 it had when it was first built. With an increase in size, the pipe organ will have more of a "bright," "crisp" sound compared to the "tubby," "lumbering" sound it once had, Grabowski and Busch said.

The pipes that already exist will be refurbished, and more will be added, with pipes ranging from just over 16-feet tall to 1/4 of an inch tall. "Some of the pipes are metal, some are wood, some are round and some are square," Busch said. "They're each designed to make different sounds."

When the project will be completed depends on how much volunteer help and financing they receive. Grabowski said that it could take as little as a year or as long as three to four years. Either way, Grabowski and Busch said that the pipe organ will one day soon be restored for the Medina community to enjoy once more.

Façade pipes at St. Mary's Church, Medina, NY

