Area man creates model of St. Paul church

BY DANIEL ARENS

One small country church near Hazen will be permanently memorialized outside of the Knife River Care Center.

Michael Sailer, who lives between Hazen and Fick City on County Road 37, has been working on this model of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church since April, basing the design on the original church, which was destroyed by a tornado in 1920.

Knife River Care Center, Beulah, is creating a flower garden outside with a section dedicated to each area church. Sailer was contacted by St. Paul’s to do the church model for them.

“They came, asked me, ‘Would you like to build the birdhouse?’” Sailer said.

This model is functional as well, being made as a birdhouse for smaller songbirds, with an entrance built above the model doors at the front of the church.

The bottom of the birdhouse is made from pressure-treated wood, with the top made from birch and the sides likely made out of hickory wood. The wood for the sides was purchased, rather than gathered by Sailer himself.

“The roof is a real shingle. It was taken off this house when we shingled it,” Sailer said, speaking from the house where he and his mother, Esther, live. “The steeple was something I had, while the most important part, the cross on top, was part of my dad’s necklace. So that’s a part of my dad there on the church.”

Besides his father’s necklace, Sailer’s mother provided the dedication on the back of the model, while his sister cut out the sign on the church’s front. Because the birdhouse is based on the previous church model, there is no ramp like that found at the actual current church, but the steps that were there before.

“I built it functional,” he went on, noting that if you pull out the screws, the top of the model church can be pulled off and set back on. “I made it the way I wanted it.”

The process of building the siding for the church took Sailer a long time, with only about three “layers” or strips able to be done at any time.

Standing outside his home, Michael Sailer holds the model of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church which he built, which will also function as a birdhouse, and will be placed in a flower garden outside the Knife River Care Center.

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“I want it to look rustic,” he said.

One thing Sailer is particularly proud of is that all of the materials he used in making the church, except the birch and siding, come from his family’s property.

Although Sailer was born in Mercer County, he grew up and has lived most of his life in Bismarck and Mandan. He moved back up to the area when his parents bought the property where the family currently resides, a mile east of Highway 200 along County 37.

Sailer, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) several years ago, lives with his mother, and works on a large variety of projects. Besides working on the church model, he has been busy with work on the property garage and lawn upkeep.

“I thought I’d have this [the church model] done by Memorial Weekend,” Sailer said, but his other activities have continually stolen some of that time away.

During the St. Paul’s service Aug. 28, Pastor Bill Wagner blessed Sailer’s work, something Sailer said was important for him before handing it over to the Care Center.

The St. Paul’s Lutheran Church congregation was founded in 1889, the same year North Dakota became a state in the Union. Sailer said it was ironic that he graduated 100 years later, in 1989. Most of the church council and leadership is made up of members of the Sailer family.

While living in Bismarck and Mandan, Sailer did a lot of construction work, but has had to refrain from much of that kind of activity since being diagnosed with MS. Despite the diagnosis, however, Sailer has still been able to do a lot of smaller work around the property where he now lives, which was purchased in 2009. If it is too hot outside, he can get overheated easily, but he finds ways to work with things when the weather is cooler.

“I know what I’m doing, on the construction side,” Sailer said, adding that his family joked that if a tornado ever came and blew the house and garage away, the deck he built would still be standing.

Although he does not go on the roof itself, he can help hand shingles up to the crews when shingling was being done, and he finds himself able to lift quite heavy items, saying that he only struggles when the item is low to the ground and has to be hoisted up.

Sailer also recently had a benign tumor removed, although he noted that the large removal could actually make his neck stronger.

Besides the various projects around the house Sailer works on, he also loves working on car models, both old and new, and collecting Star Wars merchandise.