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Building a towering symbol of timeless values: The Verdin Company

BERNE, Ind.—Bern, Switzerland is located in the scenic Swiss Alps. In the center of the old city stands the Bern clock tower, an imposing symbol that serves as the focal point of the town's activities. The tower is an internationally known landmark, and thousands of tourists travel to Bern every year to see it.

In Berne, Ind., a plan has been formulated to construct a replica of the famous clock tower. The Muensterberg Plaza and Clock Tower will identify the city of Berne with its Swiss heritage and tie it to its history. The building plan was formulated by the Berne Community Development Corporation (CDC), which is heading up the project.

The CDC was organized in 2002, and the main goal of the group is to ensure that businesses in Berne not only survive, but that they thrive in the increasingly difficult business environment of today's small towns. The clock tower project is aimed at improving the local economy by opening the door to increased trade and tourism.

"We're creating a new prosperity," said Roger Muselman, co-chairman of the project's steering committee. "This will rebrand the city."

Along with its economic advantages, the tower will symbolize the values of the founding father's; values like faith, courage, vision, determination, optimism, willingness to work and skills.

"The Muensterberg Plaza and Clock Tower will benefit the community for years to come," said Jim Beitler, co-chairman of the steering committee. "Not only will it create a visual impact that will be nationally known, but it will send a message that the Berne area is a great place to begin a new business."

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Thirteen members of the steering committee recently traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio to research construction of the clock tower. The group visited the Verdin Company, which is the world's largest supplier of clocks, clock towers, electronic carillons and bells.

The Verdin Company is in its sixth generation, and is one of the oldest family-owned companies in America. It has constructed more than 20,000 clock towers in locations throughout the world, including the Smithsonian Institution, Walt Disney World, the University of Notre Dame, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and the Mayo Clinic.

Verdin installed its first tower clock in Cincinnati in 1842, and since then has pioneered several breakthroughs in the bell and clock industry. Its most notable bell creation is the world's largest swinging bell, the 66,000 pound World Peace Bell. The bell commemorated the millennium and is now on display at the Millennium Monument in Newport, Ky.

Verdin designs and installs clocks in airports, amusement parks, churches, hotels, restaurants, freestanding towers and shopping centers. The clock towers are built in the factory and then transported to the site for installation. A representative of the company will visit Berne in the near future to determine a tower height that will best fit with the town's existing architecture.

Berne's tower will include a large clock face housed in a towering structure that will memorialize the history of the Berne area. Animated fiberglass figurines will emerge every hour to perform a reenactment of scenes from the settlement of the city.

"This project is significant," said James Verdin. "People from all around the country will know about it, and they'll come to Berne to see it because there aren't many of these things in the country."

When asked to compare the scope of Berne's clock tower to the famous World Peace Bell, Verdin said, "You have something with much more potential. The scope of what you're doing is big—very big."

Clock towers have been constructed in town squares, business parks, shopping areas and college campuses across the country and around the world. The Muensterberg Plaza and Clock Tower might well achieve the level of fame gained by the original tower, built in 1218, which still attracts visitors today.