



Photo/ERIC SCHENK

Variety of dignitaries take part in a ribbon-cutting ceremony unveiling the restored barrel storage house at the village of Whitesbog in Pemberton Township. The building, which was used to store cranberries, is one of many historic structures in the Pinelands community that is part of a preservation project funded by the state.

'Bogged' down in preservation

Fruitful work allows cranberry community to save its buildings

By Pete Perrotta
BCT staff writer

PIMBERTON TOWNSHIP — In the early 1900s, Joseph Josiah White, who came to be known as the "Cranberry King," built himself a large farm, creating the Whitesbog Village deep in the heart of the pristine Pinelands just off Route 530.

White used 600 Italian immigrants, recruited as seasonal help from South Philadelphia, to harvest the bog-grown berries. The Italians lived in two satellite villages called Florence and Rome to make them feel at home.

The village featured a general store, cabins and agricultural buildings, such as a packing plant and a barrel storage house.

At one time, many of the dormant buildings at Whitesbog lay in a state of disarray, victimized by vandals and fires.

But due to the efforts of state historical officials and the Whitesbog Preservation Trust, parts of the village have been preserved and restored.

Yesterday, state and trust officials took the wraps off the recently completed \$228,000 restoration of the barrel storage house, which was used to store barrels of cranberries.

"The Whitesbog Preservation Trust is really setting an example in New Jersey," said Robert Shinn, commissioner of the state Department of Environmental Protection. "The products of these restorations are really showing up well. This is one of the jewels of the Pine Barrens."

The DEP oversees the operation of Whitesbog because the village is part of Lebanon State Forest.

The restoration of the building, which features a railroad track down the middle of its floor, was made possible by grants from the New Jersey Historic Trust and the state Division of Parks and

Forestry.

David Banish, a member of the preservation society's board of trustees, said his group is now launching an \$86,000 fund-raising effort to put a new roof on the adjacent cranberry packing and storage house.

Banish said bracing, rafter repairs and roofing must be done to the packing house before it deteriorates completely.

"We have to protect it from the elements. If we can do the roof restoration, that should be good for five years until we get more funds to do a complete restoration," he said.