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95 years later, bridge is in place

Pedestrian span will connect Bancroft Parkway in Wilmington

By ANGIE BASIOUNY, The News Journal

WILMINGTON -- Workers carefully lowered a steel bridge into place Monday morning at Ninth Street and Bancroft Parkway, creating a safe passage over the CSX railroad line for pedestrians and closing the gap on 95 years of history.

The 150-foot span will open in September, along with the new Woodlawn Library, which stands at the southeastern foot of the bridge. The bridge will serve as a connection for residents on both sides of the tracks.

"It connects two very diverse neighborhoods," said Newlin E. Wood Jr., president of the Woodlawn Trustees, the nonprofit charitable trust that raised the money for the \$1 million span.

The trustees operate the Flats, a low-income rental community on one side of the library. On the other side is Wawaset Park, a neighborhood of large, stately homes.

William P. Bancroft, who founded the Woodlawn Trustees in 1911, had the vision to build the continuous parkway that now bears his name. The road, which links Rockford Park with Canby Park, was completed in 1928, except for the bridge at Ninth Street.

The state took the site in the late 1930s for a Department of Motor Vehicles administration building, and bridge-building was delayed because of steel shortages during World War II.

The state eventually vacated the property in 2001, giving it to the county for a new library.

"It's unbelievable to think that after 95 years, this is going to be complete," said Wood, who watched along with neighbors who gathered to see the bridge put in place.

The crew waited until after the last morning train rolled through before beginning the hour-long operation. The prefabricated bridge is actually three pieces, with two of the pieces already joined.

Workers from Pennsylvania-based J.D. Eckman Construction used large cranes and a network of steel cables to move the two pieces onto concrete footings. There are no pilings underneath to support the span, said Wilmington architect Curtis Harkin, who designed the bridge. A truss above the structure supports the weight.

"CSX had special requirements that we had to follow," he said. "There is an envelope of space above the track that we have to clear, and also we had to stay low enough to avoid the power lines."

Kent Smith, who lives in Wawaset Park, stopped by to snap a few photos and see the new bridge.

"This will restore that vision to have an interconnecting parkway through the core of the city," he said.

The trustees will turn over ownership of the bridge to the city of Wilmington, which will maintain it. Before it opens, a concrete deck will be installed and the open sides covered with steel mesh for safety, Wood said.

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