

# Bancroft Tower opening offers 'best view in Worcester'

Sunday

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WORCESTER - On a clear day, with a good pair of binoculars, you can see Boston, Mount Wachusett and Mount Monadnock, too.

“It’s the best view in Worcester, I’m convinced,” Brittany Legasey, president of Park Spirit Inc., said Sunday from atop Bancroft Tower in Salisbury Park.

“I just don’t think there’s any other vantage point where you can see our city laid out so beautifully,” she said.

The landmark stone tower styled after a medieval castle was reopened to the general public on Sunday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., as it will be every Sunday in the month of October.

This month's "open houses" at Bancroft Tower are hosted by Park Spirit, a nonprofit advocacy group for Worcester's parks, in partnership with Preservation Worcester, the Worcester Historical Museum, and the city's Parks, Recreation and Cemetery Department.

By 1 p.m. Sunday nearly 150 people had visited the tower, despite the gray weather.

The 56-foot-high tower, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1900 by Worcester philanthropist Stephen Salisbury III in honor of Worcester-born historian, statesman and diplomat George Bancroft (1800-1891), who penned an epic 10-volume history of the United States and who as secretary of the Navy established the US Naval Academy at Annapolis.

The tower has been closed to the public since the 1980s because of neighborhood concerns over security and safety. The past three years, open houses have been held on Sundays in October.

"It's a view everyone should see, and a bit of history everyone should know about," Ms. Legasey said.

"I would like to see it open more, but acknowledge it has to be done in a supervised fashion. It has to be monitored because this is a pretty dangerous structure. You could easily fall off. That's why we have people staffing every part, because we want to make sure everyone's safe."

The 2010 graduate of Doherty Memorial High School in Worcester moved back to the city after graduating from Syracuse University, and has taken up the cause of the city's parks as president of Park Spirit. This past summer, Ms. Legasey, 24, visited 60 city parks in 60 days, posting pictures on the group's Facebook page.

She said her parents live down the hill from Bancroft Tower, on Germain Street.

"I've always walked the dog up here and I just wanted to go in here so badly just to see what it was like," she said. "Fortunately, now I'm able to share it with everyone else."

When the leaves turn in coming weeks, she said, the view from the tower will be striking.

"All these trees have different colors," she said, from her vantage atop the tower, where she greeted visitors Sunday afternoon. "I actually come up here in the winter a lot just to sit, because you can see through the trees. You see Worcester laid out beautifully."

The tower, which has served as a backdrop in the past to Shakespeare performances and Bloomsday readings, is equipped with working fireplaces. "We've lit them in the past when it gets colder in October," said Ms. Legasey. "I actually wish we did it today."

At the entrance to the tower, volunteers Rick Miller and Winnie Octave ("like the music," she said) welcomed visitors and accepted voluntary one-dollar donations in support of park preservation.

"It's such a historical and architectural gem," said Mr. Miller, a Germain Street resident who is treasurer of Park Spirit.

Ms. Octave, founder of the Green Hill Neighborhood Association, originally hails from St. Lucia in the West Indies, and has lived in Worcester for decades.

Yet she had never visited Bancroft Tower until Sunday. She commented on the history behind the tower, named for the Naval Academy's founder. "I just learned that today!" she exclaimed.

Families with children clambered up the rain-slicked steps of the stone tower and peered from the windows of its chambers. “Cheese!” shouted youngsters posing for a snapshot in the tower.

A sightseer whose head poked up over the crenellated turret called to mind a French guard in Monty Python and the Holy Grail.

Joseph Holland of Worcester, visiting with his three daughters, Cali, 12, Serenity, 8, and Allura, 6, wore a GoPro camera attached to his ball cap for shooting video.

“Thirty-five years old, lived in Worcester all my life, and I’ve never been in this building before,” Mr. Holland said.

“I saw it was going to be open and thought I’d come with the girls,” he said.

Daughter Cali said: “At first I thought it was going to be scary. From the top we saw a lot of trees and houses. If it was sunnier, you’d see more stuff.”

Anthony Caraballo and Jermain Pillot of Worcester, leading a pair of bulldogs on leashes, said they had been looking for a place to walk their dogs on a rainy day and decided to visit Bancroft Tower. “It’s really cool, actually,” said Mr. Caraballo. The dogs, Milo and Fiona, appeared likewise to approve, hopping on stubby legs to peer from apertures in the stone tower.

The 56-foot tower, at the crown of 720-foot Bancroft Heights, feels remarkably high at the top.

Too high, for Ms. Octave, who said she passed on the best view in Worcester because it meant scaling the pinnacle.

“You have to be up there and I wouldn’t go up there for nothing,” she said, with a laugh, pointing up to the top of the turret.

“I’m surprised at how the kids enjoy it. There’s a kid who came back three times. He said he’s coming back next week. He loved it.”