

Confluence Tower switches to winter hours in an effort to finally break even

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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HARTFORD - For the last six years, the Confluence Tower has been hemorrhaging money.

Current Hartford Mayor Jim Hickerson, who was not a part of the original construction project, said the upkeep and maintenance of the tower was costing an average of \$59,000 a year over the last half-dozen years. Originally, the tower was funded by grants, donations and a large portion of village funding. Hickerson said he did not want to comment regarding how large of an investment the village placed into the tower, but assured it was sizable during an interview with Riverbender.com Wednesday morning.

To help stop the accelerated loss of money, the village has attempted to cut staff hours and wages. This year, however, Hickerson said the village is going a step further and making the autumn and winter months available by appointment only at the Confluence Tower.

"It's going to be a struggle, but we're doing everything we can to break even at this point," he said. "We're doing some brainstorming and idea searching to bring more activities to the site and bring more money into the cash registers."

While it may only be available by appointment, and at least a little notice, Hickerson said he and Hartford Village Trustee Bernie Caldwell have made themselves accessible during these months to ensure people who would like to take an elevator ride to the top of the tower can do it.

"If I had five people call me right now, I would go down there and open it right now," Hickerson said.

Anyone who would like to take Hickerson at his offer is invited to contact him at (618) 251-2691. Rides to the top of the tower, which provide a most excellent view of the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers cost \$6 for adults, but are much cheaper for children, and group rates could be negotiated, Hickerson said.

That elevator coupled with electricity, staff wages, maintenance on the grounds and a myriad of other expenditures is why the tower is currently in the red, and has been for some time.

When it reopens for regular hours on April 1, Hickerson said the village hopes to see its cost-cutting measures result in the tower finally breaking even. From a municipal standpoint, he said that is the best hope. He said he never foresees it making a profit.

In the future, Hickerson expects the site, which he described as "beautiful," would be utilized for things beyond the tower. He said fun experiences such as weddings and flea markets could utilize the site surrounding the tower in the warmer months, which may provide some additional revenue.

"Other things need to be done down there other than just going up in the tower," Hickerson said. "We've had music and ice carvers and wood carvers there. Those were all fine, but they did not draw enough people."

As of April 1, the Confluence Tower will reopen to the general public for normal hours. When asked if he foresaw the tower eventually closing for good, Hickerson said it was a worst case possibility. He said these measures were being taken to see if the tower could at least break even. If it ultimately cannot, Hickerson said the tower could one day shut its doors for good - but as of now, that is a far-off scenario.