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Bridgeton, Ind. – With tears, volunteers and community pride abundant, there is once again a covered bridge near the old mill here in Parke County.

Bridgeton's historic covered bridge was destroyed by arson April 28, 2005. The community, an army of volunteers, and two industrial sized cranes put the bridge back together Monday morning.

The job isn't quite complete. The two huge structures, made of tulip poplar trees donated by area farmers, were set in place Monday. Workers must now build the roof, floor and then affix the red panel siding to finish the job. They expect to have the bridge ready in time for October's popular Parke County Bridge Festival.

"It really touched me to look out there and see the bridge again. It's amazing," said Mike Roe, owner of the mill who spearheaded much of the volunteer effort to rebuild.

Residents were resolute in their desire to rebuild after the arson fire but the numbers were staggering. One estimate set the replacement cost at \$1.5 million, Roe said. But the community wasn't counting on the outpouring of rage and then resolution to restore the bridge. The costs will somewhat exceed \$200,000 thanks to the staggering volunteer effort.

"In this day and age you wouldn't think this many people could come together and do something like this," Roe said. "The cost was going to be \$1.5 million and it's not going to cost the county a dime. It's just dedicated people and some very talented people who have come in with their own expertise."

Most of the lumber was donated. Much of the labor was donated. Wabash College took down 25 students June 1 to help stack lumber then returned Aug. 22 with another 25 students to clean up and stain the bridge's siding.

Approximately 1,000-1,500 turned out Monday with cameras in hand to see the first major step in the reconstruction. The crowd snapped away with their cameras and collectively held their breath as the huge industrial cranes lifted each section and set them gently into place.

Among the crowd were students from Southern Parke School district. Susie Runyon teaches a section of Indiana history on covered bridges and the bridge builders.

"They've studied the construction and they know about the Kingpost and Burr Arch Truss," Runyon explained. "They've learned about the natural resources used for these bridges and available in our county. They know our county has so many of these bridges still standing because of the Burr Arch Truss. We use this to do a lot of writing, poetry and art. These bridges just cover everything."

But the real reason Runyon brought her third through sixth graders to Bridgeton ran deeper than another school lesson or seeing history in the making.

“Hopefully these kids will assume responsibility,” she said while tearing up. “Hopefully they’ll assume responsibility for preservation of landmarks like our bridges.”