

By Susan Smallheer

At the exact time the historic Bartonsville Covered Bridge was swept away by a raging Williams River a year ago, Bartonsville village residents gathered Tuesday to toast the rebuilding of a new covered bridge.

The 1870 bridge was swept away at 4:30 p.m. on Aug. 28, 2011, said Susan Hammond, who led the gathering in the toast.

Hammond, a lifelong Bartonsville resident, made the now-famous video showing the covered bridge slipping off its abutments and floating away on the Tropical Storm Irene-swollen river. She said her camera made the time imprint.

Standing in front of a banner that read, "We're Rebuilding History," with a drawing of the bridge, Hammond was joined Tuesday afternoon under sunny skies by U.S. Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., Rockingham Town Manager Timothy Cullenen and a group of area residents.

They remembered the old bridge with a moment of silence. They celebrated the new bridge with a toast of special "Bartonsville Beer," brewed by Hammond at a specialty brewery in New Hampshire in honor of the event.

"Memories matter in life," said Welch, who said that Hammond's video was viewed by millions of Americans and became the signature symbol of Irene's destruction in Vermont.

"We are 'Vermont Strong.' We are Bartonsville Strong," Hammond said.

With the prompting of Cullenen, the group even repeated Hammond's now infamous expletive as the bridge fell into the raging river. "'Oh s---,'" the group repeated, laughing.

Preparation for the new Bartonsville Covered Bridge is already under way — a large excavator provided background noise as it prepared a site for the construction of the bridge.

Cullenen and Hammond, who spearheaded the local fund-raising and rebuilding effort, said it would be mid winter before the new, bigger and stronger bridge is ready for traffic.

Cullenen said the new bridge would cost about \$2.5 million, and that the town had recently reached a better settlement with its insurers, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns. The organization had originally low-balled the town with an offer of only \$190,000, Cullenen said, but eventually came up to \$757,000.

The town will look to FEMA and the state to help pay for the rest of the bridge, with the town's share of all its Irene expenses capped at three cents on its tax rate.

The community also celebrated with a barbecue in the orchard of Marvie Campbell, whose home is closest to the bridge crossing.

A temporary Bailey bridge has been in place since the winter, but the community will lose that for at least a month in December, Cullenen said.

The new bridge will be taller and longer than the 1870 version, which itself replaced another covered bridge which was swept away in flooding in 1869, in a crossing upstream from the current location.

Scott Newman, a historic preservation expert with the Agency of Transportation, said he was thrilled with the town's decision to build a new covered bridge.

Newman said between 12 to 15 of the state's 100 covered bridges were damaged by the Irene

flooding, with only one — Bartonsville — destroyed. Of the dozen that were damaged, about six were seriously damaged, but all will be repaired and reopened, he said.

Of those six, another one, the Worrall Covered Bridge, is in Rockingham as well. The other seriously damaged covered bridges are in Taftsville, Northfield, Arlington and West Windsor, Newman said.

Hammond said she had been ridiculed and personally attacked by people on the Internet for being so emotional about a covered bridge. Hammond said she cried when the bridge was swept away, and her emotional outburst was caught on the video, which Hammond posted on YouTube.

Hammond and other Bartonsville residents said the bridge was a member of the community, a place to congregate, swim, fish and skate.

Newman said the covered bridges, which are owned by towns, not the state, have a special hold on the public's imagination.

"They come from the mid 19th century. They were built by hand, with lumber cut by hand. These bridges become part of the fabric of a community," he said.

The community, which has already raised about \$50,000 toward the bridge's reconstruction, is still fund-raising and selling commemorative items which can be viewed at [www.bartonsvillebridge.com](http://www.bartonsvillebridge.com), Hammond said.