

New neighborhood gets a classic touch

Upscale subdivision recycles huge stone blocks from old bridge



James Reid, left, and Pablo Ortiz worked atop the dry-laid stone retaining wall along Tates Creek Road this week.



Pablo Ortiz looked over the fence he and others have been building for McAtee Run subdivision.

By Jim Warren

HERALD-LEADER STAFF WRITER

Fashion comes and goes; iron rusts away. But stone is forever.

Rock quarried for construction projects a century ago remains solid, strong and ready for re-use today. Which is why work crews are using huge sandstone blocks from an old bridge abutment in Northern Kentucky to erect a new retaining wall for an upscale subdivision being developed on Tates Creek Road.

The stone blocks — some up to 5 feet long and weighing 4 tons — originally were part of an abutment for Newport's old 10th Street Bridge, which carried street traffic over the railroad tracks there. The old span was replaced two years ago. The leftover blocks were ideal for the new dry laid stone retaining wall at McAtee Run Estates subdivision, said stonemason Richard McAlister, whose company is building the wall.

"We could have used smaller stone to build the wall, but we were fortunate in having access to these really big blocks," McAlister said. "So, it worked out perfectly."

McAlister said he obtained the blocks through a stone supply business.

See STONES, B7



Large pieces of sandstone rock lined the road as employees with McAlister Stone fitted them together for the dry-laid stone fence.

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STONES | Wall to extend 500 feet along front of neighborhood

From Page B1

The retaining wall stretches about 300 feet along the east side of Tates Creek Road, and contains an estimated 600 tons of stone. The wall is about 6 feet wide at its base, tapering to a width of about 4 feet at the top, which is roughly level with the roadway. Now, masons are adding a 6-foot high stone fence that sits atop the retaining wall. Altogether, stonework will extend about 500 feet along the front of McAtee Run.

McAlister's company has been laboring on the retaining wall and related stonework off and on since late last summer. It probably will take until early this summer to finish the project, he said.

Dry laid stone takes time, each stone shaped and fitted by hand in a process perfected hundreds of years ago. When it's done right, the individual stones lock together to form a timeless wall without mortar or cement. But it's tough work, hard on the hands and hard on

the back.

"A chiropractor's dream we are," quipped stonemason Bill Harbinson, who works for McAlister.

The blocks used in the retaining wall, however, were so big that they had to be lifted into place by a fork lift.

Don Jacobs, who is developing McAtee Run, said it probably would have been cheaper to build the retaining wall with modern materials and methods. But using dry laid stone was more in keeping with Kentucky

tradition, he said.

"We wanted to build the finest neighborhood in Fayette County," Jacobs said.

It's unclear exactly how old the stone blocks from Newport are. State Transportation Cabinet records on the Newport bridge go back to 1930, about the time the state took over the bridge from the railroad, said cabinet spokeswoman Nancy Wood. But highway officials aren't sure exactly when the bridge was built.

Many of the blocks carry initials and dates carved or scratched into their surfaces long ago by passersby who stopped to leave a personal record. Much of the writing has been weathered away, but you can still make out dates from the early 1900s, even 1876.



The development behind the retaining wall has 13 estate lots and sits just north of the main entrance to the Hartland subdivision.

CHARLES BERTRAM | STAFF

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