Harrison sports Russian look

By Jen Roppel
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Miami University is adopting a Russian look for its building named after an American president. In celebration of "Imagining Russia" festival of events inaugurating the Havighurst Center for Russian and Post-Soviet Studies, workers began to place newly constructed golden Russian onion domes atop Harrison Hall's twin towers this week. "The political science building is named for Russian native and President Benjamin Harrison," Russian natives and Havighurst Center academics Stanislav Touronok and Galina Puchinukova said during an inauguration ceremony. The domes, usually only found on Russian churches, are authentic looking, but on a lesser scale. Touronok said the Russian cupolas are much more ornate. "They must be covered with real gold," he said.

Project manager MU Physical Facilities Assistant Director Steve Pohman said the Miami cupolas are designed to withstand spring weather conditions, and to be reusable. The domes will come down after graduation but can be placed atop Harrison Hall to commemorate Imaging Russia events for years to come. "It's constructed out of a wood frame with a foam coating painted with as bright a gold as we could find," Pohman said.

Designed by a Cincinnati structural engineering firm and built by a local contracting firm, the domes weigh 5,000 pounds and are more than 15 feet base to top. The domes were crafted in two pieces that were joined on site Monday. Funding for the $30,000 project came from a multimillion dollar gift from the late Walter Havighurst, long-time Miami English professor and his wife. Puchinukova, a Russian architect, said she is impressed that Miami is embracing such an important symbol of her homeland, which she said is the beacon of a Russian spiritual revival. "It is a symbol of new Russia. It's very positive. It's very interesting, the use of an old symbol of Russia as a symbol for new Russia.

"I think it's a very good idea," said Richard Daschbach, a professor of Russian literature. The mastermind behind the creation of the domes is Havighurst Center Director Karen Davis.

"I would look up at those two cupolas and think this would be so cool if they were domes," Dawisha said of Harrison Hall's copper towers.

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