



LINDY KEAST ROOMAN/TIMES-DISPATCH

Dianne Watkins, founder of Bells for Peace, hopes to put new bells in the Belgian Friendship Pavilion on the campus of Virginia Union University in Richmond.

Belgian Bell Tower

GROUP TO RESTORE 35-BELL CARILLON AT VIRGINIA UNION

BY DEVORAH BEN-DAVID Special Correspondent

ON THE CAMPUS of Virginia Union University stands a modern prefabricated building, which arrived from Belgium in 1939 for the New York World's Fair. Designed by architect Henry Van de Velde, an originator of the Belgian Art Nouveau movement, the Belgian Friendship Pavilion aimed to bridge the gap between modern art and architecture.

The modern structure included a 161-foot bell tower (Vann Memorial Tower), which once housed an impressive carillon of 35 brass bells. The bells delighted fair spectators as it played Belgian folk songs. But as war raged in Nazi-occupied Belgium, Van de Velde realized the pavilion could not be shipped back to Belgium safely.

In 1941 the highly coveted pavilion was dismantled, and the government of Belgium awarded it to Virginia Union Univer-

sity. The tower's bells, however, were given to the "Hoover Institution Library" at Stanford University.

Dianne Watkins, founder and chairman of the board of Bells for Peace Inc., and her brother, Alan Nelson, who located the original bells at the Hoover Presidential Library, are spearheading fundraising efforts to buy new bells ranging in weight from 4,700 pounds to 184 pounds.

"The bells represent a renaissance in educational excellence for our community," Watkins said. "We believe through education our world can become a more peaceful place."

Belgium Peace Building: 1500 N. Lombardy St. www.bellsforpeace.org. For information, call Dianne Watkins at 359-3009.