

NEWS

Gold leaves for Colorado Capitol building dome return from Italy



1 of 2
Gov. John Hickenlooper lifts a box of gold leaf to check how heavy it is during a delivery ceremony Tuesday.

By **ALLY MAROTTI** | The Denver Post
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It took only a day to mine and three months to mill, but it will be another year before the public gets a full view of the gold gilding the Capitol dome.

Seventy-five ounces of gold donated by AngloGold Ashanti and Cripple Creek & Victor Gold Mining Co. was carried up the steps of the Capitol building Tuesday by mine employees — most of it in 140,000 leaves that each weighs no more than a mosquito.

The gold leaf will be the finishing touch to a three-year project to repair the dome and lantern, damaged from years of water infiltration and the harsh freeze-thaw cycle of Denver’s climate.

A 10-ounce ingot was saved for future repairs.

The gold, valued at more than \$116,000, traveled far between the time it was mined in Teller County and when it was locked away by State Treasurer Walker Stapleton on Tuesday.

After it was mined near Victor, it was shipped to Utah and refined to 24 karat (.9999 pure) gold. In March, 65 ounces were flown to Florence, Italy, and milled into gold leaf.

The total donation, including refining and shipping to Utah and Italy, is valued at about \$125,000.

“The ticket for the gold to get to and from Italy cost way more than my plane ticket,” said Marie Patterson, an AngloGold Ashanti manager of state government affairs who used her own vacation time to go to Italy and watch the leaf-making process.

The gold was refined into leaf at Giusto Manetti Battiloro, a company that has been operating for about 300 years. Most of the job is done very precisely with machines, Patterson said, but some parts of the process require human help.

“If it’s wrinkled or crooked, they lightly blow on (the gold leaf) to settle it,” she said. “They’ve been doing this for three centuries, so they have it down to a science.”

Doug Wilson, a Cripple Creek & Victor Gold Mining Co. manager, said it takes only a day to mine the amount of gold needed to cover the dome.

“A small amount can be spread so thin,” he said.

The gold returned to Denver in June and will be burnished onto the dome over copper and primer this summer.

“They transfer the gold leaf from the paper to the copper by varnishing the back of it,” state architect Larry Friedberg said, describing the final stages of the restoration. “It can be (varnished using) cotton balls, it can be cloth, it could be brushes, it can be a lot of different ways. It all depends.”

It will take about three months for the gold to be applied, at the rate of 50 to 100 square feet a day.

The original gold — also donated by Cripple Creek more than a century ago — and copper covering the dome will be salvaged, Friedberg said. The project is on time and on budget and should be done by next summer.

The observation deck, which closed in 2006 when a chunk of the dome fell, prompting the restoration, will reopen.

“So if we do our job right,” Friedberg said, “once the cover comes down, nobody will ever know we were there.”

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