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### Tiptop view

Public tours of Capitol dome resuming after 30 years

By **Tim Carpenter**

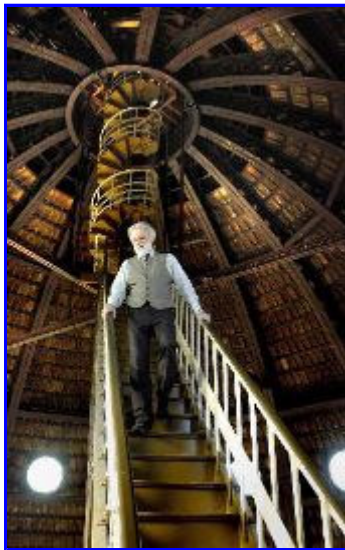
*The Capital-Journal*

Glen Deitcher is excited about resumption of public tours of the Statehouse dome.

It has been about 55 years since he crept up the spiral staircase with a high school friend from Ottawa, who immortalized the occasion by using lipstick to scratch his initials -- J.P. -- on an interior wall of the landmark structure in downtown Topeka.

"Quite a view," said Deitcher, who became a Statehouse tour guide after retiring from the secretary of state's office. "If you're in high school or grade school, it's one of the most interesting things you can do."

The Kansas State Historical Society is preparing to conduct free public tours of the dome for the first time since the early 1970s. The upper portion of the Capitol has been accessible only to private tours of students who serve as House or Senate pages or to special guests of legislators.



**Thad Allton/The Capital-Journal**

Statehouse architect Barry Greis makes his way down from the Statehouse cupola. The distance from the fifth floor to the observation deck involves 296 steps.

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"I'm so glad that people will have this opportunity to get up there and look around," said Mary Madden, the historical society's interim director of education and outreach. "It's breathtaking in more ways than one. It's beautiful. And it's a real climb."

Madden said she expects tours to start Jan. 23. Excursions to the top will be scheduled six times each weekday during the 2006 legislative session, which traditionally runs through May.

Guests in groups of 30 -- reservations will be accepted -- have an opportunity to climb from the fifth floor of the Capitol to an exterior observation deck. On a clear day, a person standing against the outside railing might be able to see for up to 10 miles.

The distance from the fifth floor to the observation deck requires one to traverse 296 steps. There is an elevator to the fifth floor, but none higher into the dome.

Halfway into the walk up the curved structure, guests reach a **Photos** juncture that marks the transition from a stairwell running along the copper wall of the dome to a catwalk closer to the inner, decorative portion of the dome.

"This is a fun part," Madden said. "You have to cross from the side of the dome to the middle on a free-hanging stairwell."

For



[See more of the views of the interior of the Statehouse dome.](#)

### **To the top**

**What:** Tours of the Statehouse dome.

**Times:** 11:45 a.m., 12:15 p.m., 12:45 p.m., 1:15 p.m., 1:45 p.m. and 2:15 p.m. each day of the 2006 session, beginning Jan. 23.

**To schedule a tour:** Call 296-3966.

**For information:** Go to [www.kshs.org](http://www.kshs.org).  
some, she said, it is a frightening experience.

"If you have any fear of heights that's when you say, 'I've seen enough,' " she said.

At the end of the spiral upper staircase, Madden said, tourists with nerve get the payoff. They can step onto an observation balcony, which is encircled by a railing, nearly 300 feet above ground.

Visitors who reach the summit -- or those who want to leave that impression -- can broadcast the feat through the purchase of memorial T-shirts. Proceeds will be used by the historical society to defray the cost of the tours.

Two options of shirts:

- "I climbed 296 steps today. What did you do?"
- "Ad astra per aspera. Up the stairs through difficulty."

Madden said the new tours would expose people to graffiti inside upper reaches of the dome, but none will be added by visitors on the new tours. Neither Deitcher nor his friend J.P. will have another crack at it.

"We're not going to let people write on a historical building," she said.

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