Buddy Lattea (top) and another worker with Shenandoah Restorations Inc. of Columbia repair the stained-glass windows in The Citadel's Summerall Chapel.
Many people viewing the large stained-glass windows inside The Citadel's Summerall Chapel might hope to see the light, in a spiritual sense, but they don't want to see the sky.

And yet that's what Chaplain Thomas Golden says he saw when he became the school's chaplain five years ago.

"I saw this shaft of light," he says. "I thought there was some breakage there."

Despite his observation, no one at the chapel realized the extent of the deterioration to some of the stained-glass windows.

That's partly because those in the worst condition were also the highest off the ground. The problem was most acute in the chapel's largest and most prominent windows: its facade window, which faces west and into the afternoon sun, and the chancel window above the altar, which catches the morning sun.

The undeniable evidence of the problem didn't arrive until a few years ago, when the school repainted the chapel's interior. Some streaks under the facade window quickly reappeared, proof that it had a leak.

The Citadel bid out a project to repair the protective outer window, but one of the bidders, Shenandoah Restorations Inc. of Columbia, noticed there was a much larger problem.

Looking up, one could see bulges where the lead caning had begun to fail after more than six decades of temperature fluctuations and other wear, such as vibrations from nearby cannon fire.

That's when the school decided to rebid the project to include restorations of the windows themselves, not just their protective exterior coverings.

While the chapel's stained glass is designed to last for centuries, the lead caning in the windows needs more frequent maintenance, says Butch Lattea of Shenandoah Restorations, which specializes in stained-glass restoration and got the job.

"If a really bad storm had come through, it could have taken the panels completely out," he says.

"It's hard to underestimate the
Chapel gets window dressing

importance of the windows to the chapel, which was built in 1936-37. The first words of the school's brochure on the chapel are: "The outstanding glory of the building is its stained glass." A look around the inside shows a simple interior with little other decoration aside from the 154 separate stained-glass windows crafted from untold thousands of pieces of glass. A single studio, Pittsburgh Stained Glass Studios, created all the windows, which were installed incrementally in the decade after the chapel opened. Each class through the Class of 1944 had a chance to buy a window as a memorial to its members. Fortunately, the school didn't have to ask the cash-strapped state for help to do the $60,000 window restoration. The Citadel is able to do most of the chapel maintenance, including this, with money from a special fund created by contributions from the 150 or so cadets who chose to get married in the chapel each year.

The company is checking the many windows along the north and south transepts, but they're largely in better shape because they get little direct sun, Mattea says. The most challenging part of the job is repairing the bulges, which involves workers on both the windows exterior and interior working together, he says. The work, which began a few weeks ago, is expected to be done by early August.

The project also includes cleaning, repairing and improving the protective storm window, replacing several pieces of glass that have been shattered. Previous repairs simply replaced broken pieces with glass that was "cold painted," and not fired in a kiln, Mattea says. Those pieces already are lightening up to the point where it is clear they don’t belong, something especially evident on a green piece on the Class of 1906's window.

Mattea says the replacement pieces are being painted and baked in a kiln, just as the originals were. "The color will be there long after I'm forgotten about," he says.

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