

## Boston Post Cane tradition returns to Leominster

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LEOMINSTER -- The city has a new Boston Post Cane.

Mayor Dean Mazarella's office purchased a replica and is having it inscribed at Joseph's Jewelers.

The original cane was stolen from City Hall in 2009, but the tradition of naming the city's oldest resident is being resurrected with the replica.

The city is putting out a call to its senior citizens to step forward so officials can determine who is the oldest, said mayoral aide Michelle Rattavong.

"It's a tradition City Hall has been doing for years," Rattavong said.

Residents are asked to call City Hall at 978-534-7500 if they believe they are the oldest person in the city or know who is the oldest.

Victoria Girouard held the cane from January 2006 until her death at age 104 in July 2010. She was succeeded by Lucia

Ross until her death in October 2010, when she was 105.

No one has held the honor since then.

This is the second time the original Boston Post Cane disappeared. It had been missing for decades until a Maine resident found the ebony stick on eBay and told the city.

Mazarella raised \$600 to buy it and reinstated the tradition. The cane was kept in a glass case, and each recipient received a pin to symbolize the cane.

The cane disappeared during a renovation to Mazarella's office in August 2009.

Canes around New England are lost, stolen and found regularly.

According to The Boston Post Cane website maintained by the Maynard Historical



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Society, which tracks the canes for 350 communities, Clinton, Maine's cane was stolen from its Town Hall last June.

Bethlehem, N.H., found its cane after putting out the word around town that, like Leominster, it was looking for its oldest resident last year.

A resident remembered seeing it in a closet, but it was unclear how it got there, according to the Manchester Union-Leader.

Mazzarella's assistant, Michelle Nadeau, ordered a new cane from Peterboro, N.H., for \$135.

The town had to replace its own cane and has extras.

"We have replicas that we purchased because you can't have one or two made up, you have to have them made up in batches," said Assistant Town Administrator Nicole McStay. "They look almost exactly like our original, but they do vary from town to town. Some have a more rounded cap or darker wood."

The former Boston Post publisher Edwin A. Grozier sent about 700 canes to towns, but not cities, around New England as a publicity stunt in August 1909.

Leominster didn't become a city until 1915.

The newspaper did not send any canes to

Connecticut and apparently only two towns in Vermont were issued the walking sticks.

The canes were made of ebony wood from the Congo. The wood was cut to length, seasoned for six months, turned on lathes, coated and polished.

Each one had a 14-carat gold head 2 inches long with an inscription bearing the town's name.

The cane was to be given to the oldest man in town with the compliments of the newspaper.

When the oldest man died, the cane would be passed to the next senior.

The canes were finally handed out to women as well starting in 1930.

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