

Maryland-based Company Leads Restoration of DISTRICT'S HISTORICAL CALL BOXES

By Malik E. Wilson, III



22nd Street & Decatur Street NW
BEFORE RESTORATION
Photo courtesy of Mark Rudden.



22nd Street & Decatur Street NW
AFTER RESTORATION
Photo courtesy of Mark Rudden.

The restored Call Boxes seen throughout Washington, D.C. today are not only remnants of the reliable networks of fire and police services set up across the District in the mid-1800s, but also beautiful additions to the streetscape. Since the 1860s, hundreds of these call boxes were an integral part of civic safety. Connected by long underground cables, the cables formed a telegraph network that alerted firemen and policemen. But by the 1970s, new technologies had made the police and fire boxes obsolete. The boxes were abandoned and fell into disrepair.

Today, efforts to rehabilitate these boxes can be seen all over Washington, DC. Maryland-based Chevy Chase Exteriors, a leader in restoration-focused preservation, was contracted to lead the Sheridan-Kalorama Call Box Restoration Project. The project, organized by Betty Kotcher and Holly Sukenik, successfully restored 16 historic call boxes in the Kalorama neighborhood to their original design. Each call box was sandblasted to its bare metal, treated with a cold galvanizing compound, and covered by two coats of industrial epoxy. Once dried, the boxes were hand-finished with 23 karat gold leaf and sealed to protect them from the elements.

Now restored, one gets a sense not only of the utility of the call boxes but also of their beauty. The pride of urban connection, the infrastructure of safety, and the pleasant functionality of the call box system are seen in their original glory. ■



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