

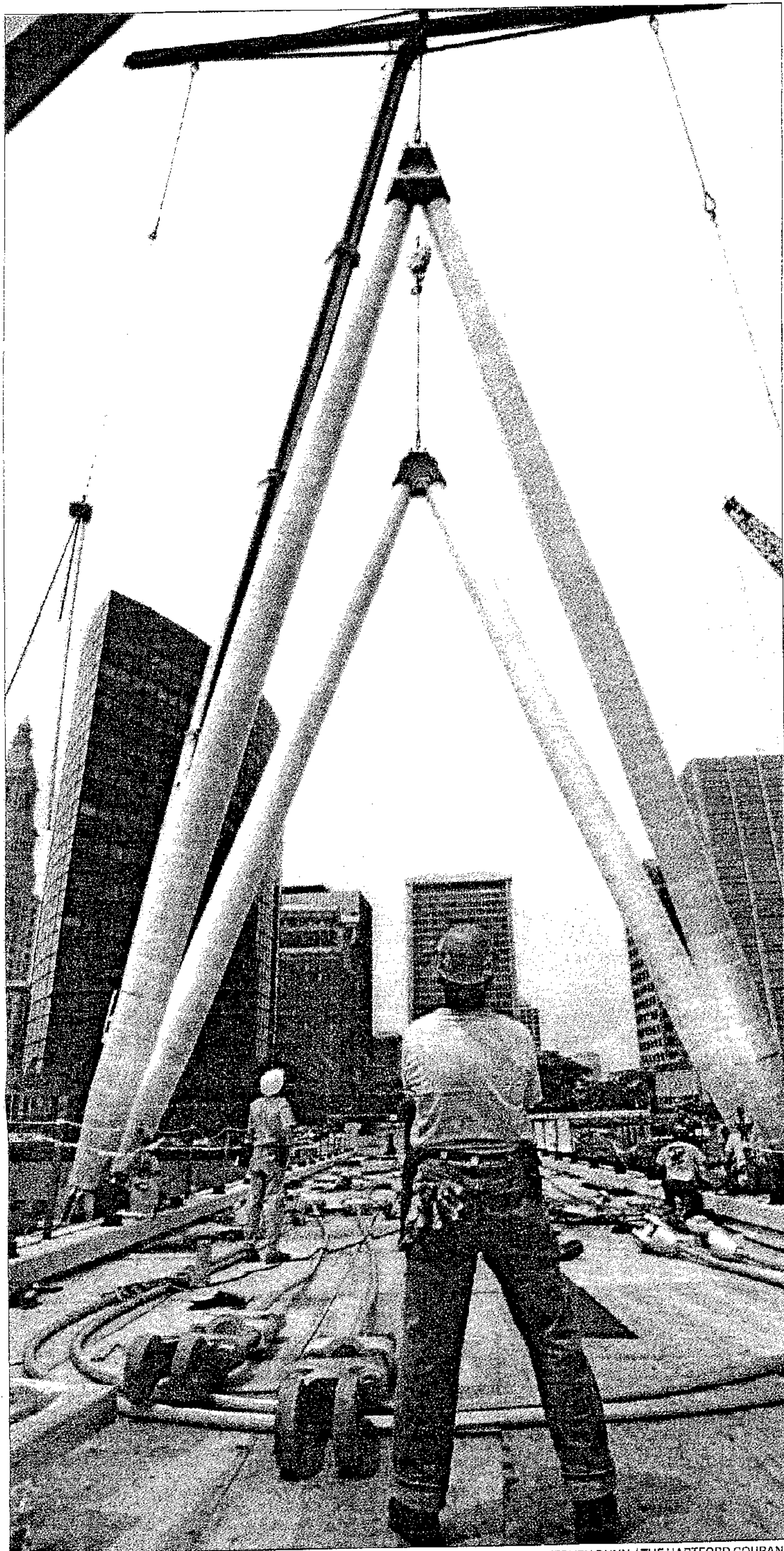
CONNECTICUT

ON THE WEEKEND

SUNDAY, JULY 1, 2001

SECTION B

CONSTRUCTION CREW FILLS A TALL ORDER



STEPHEN DUNN / THE HARTFORD COURANT

A MASSIVE STEEL AND WIRE BRIDGE STRUCTURE, which will resemble a schooner when completed, is rising atop the new Columbus Boulevard pedestrian bridge.

Downtown Pedestrian Bridge Takes On A More Nautical Feel

By EDMUND H. MAHONY
COURANT STAFF WRITER

Visitors drawn by Hartford's hot new pedestrian attraction found the path blocked Saturday, but only temporarily, as a construction crew began work to set the crowning adornment atop the city's newly completed walkway to and over the Connecticut River.

By tonight, if the schedule unfolds as planned, an impressionistic, buffed stainless steel river schooner should soar nearly 60 feet above the new pedestrian

bridge linking downtown with Riverfront Recapture's Riverfront Plaza and its connected walkways.

The steel sailing vessel is designed as an architectural element above the elevated walkway over Columbus Boulevard. That walkway connects Constitution Plaza and the plaza around the Phoenix building with various promenades now associated with the Founders Bridge.

Four polished, stainless steel columns and steel cables nearly 2 inches in diameter have been designed as elements of ship's rig-

ging and will give the walkway's superstructure its nautical motif. It will be a literal reconnection between the modern city and river as well as a figurative link to Hartford's history as a prosperous port.

The nautical superstructure was designed by architect Tai Soo Kim of Hartford. It should be visible from I-91 and I-84, rising 100 feet over Columbus Boulevard and illuminated at night by upward pointing lights.

Although the nautical super-

PLEASE SEE BRIDGE, PAGE B2

Bridge

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1

structure signals the completion of the project, the walkway over Columbus Boulevard has been open since May and already has resulted in a notable increase in foot traffic. It enables visitors to walk to the river from just below the Old State House without having to climb steep stairways and cross hair-raising traffic on Columbus Boulevard.

"It has cut two minutes off my commute," quipped Chip Geer, who lives in the Riverpoint condominium tower on the river's East Hartford bank and walks each morning over the Founders Bridge to Lewis Street in Hartford, where he and his wife own Acorn Studio, a graphic design business.

"We're pleased to see all this happening," he said Saturday morning, as two cranes lifted the four, 7.5-ton columns into place. "It's going to be a draw to bring folks to visit the Riverfront."

The project seems already to have exerted its influence on

Geer and his wife, Mary, both of whom have volunteered as River Rangers with Riverfront Recapture, the enthusiastic, nonprofit group behind all the waterfront improvements. The Geers, horse owners, will be on their own mounts as rangers during upcoming river festivals.

The Columbus Boulevard walkway with its nautical superstructure cost \$3.3 million and was funded by public grants and private donations.

"This is unique," Marc Nicol, Riverfront Recapture's project manager, said of the nautical steel being erected Saturday. "There is probably nothing like it in the world."

The Columbus Boulevard walkway may be the most visible of the city's riverfront improvements, but it is not alone. A \$3.6 million boathouse is under construction in Riverside Park. There are connected walkways along both sides of the river from downtown almost to the south meadows.

Nicol said Riverfront Recapture's next project is a 1,200-foot paved walkway on the Hartford side of the river between the Founders and Bulkeley bridges.