

ARTS ALLEY

SWIFT TOWER

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WHAT IS A SWIFT TOWER, AND WHY IS IT HERE?

- Chimney Swifts are migrating birds with an impressive travel schedule. They overwinter in South America, as far south as Peru, and come here to breed. One of the reasons we welcome them, is that Swifts eat nearly one third of their weight in flying insect pests, such as mosquitoes, biting flies, and termites every day!
- Chimney Swifts are more closely related to hummingbirds than any other type of bird. They provide impressive aerial displays while courting and spend the entire day on the wing- eating, drinking and even bathing while flying. When a flock re-enters a nesting site at dusk, birders call their spiraling formation a "swift-nado!" What better location for their performance than Arts Alley?
- Just like Purple Martins, the Chimney Swifts rely almost exclusively on man-made structures for nest sites. Originally named American Swifts, the birds once nested in large hollow trees. As America's old growth forests were cut, Chimney Swifts adapted to the loss by nesting in chimneys and man-made structures. They are now primarily found in cities and towns, like Fairhope.
- Chimney Swifts are declining in numbers. They are losing habitat as old masonry chimneys are torn down or capped, and new chimneys built with screens or slick metal surfaces that don't allow roosting. This habitat loss and other pressures, like an increase in pesticide use, have caused a steady decline in their population since 1966. They need our help!
- Like watching a beautiful sunset, observing Chimney Swifts' aerial acrobatics offers us an experience of nature's artistry. Towers such as this are an important way to welcome these impressive birds as they travel through our region. This Swift tower is extra tall so that it rises above the parking garage, but a typical free standing swift tower need only be about 12 feet tall and can be easily built out of wood or masonry.

The Arts Alley Chimney Swift Tower was built by Lanier Chew in 2024 as his Eagle Scout Project. The design was donated by WATERSHED, and materials and heavy equipment for the erection were donated by the City of Fairhope. Chimney Swift information provided by Alabama Audubon. Swift Tower plans adapted from "Chimney Swift Towers: New Habitat for America's Mysterious Birds" by Paul D. Kyle