



Photo By: Aaron C. Jors

A Letter from Board President Dick Taylor:

The 2020 summer season at Point Betsie Lighthouse has certainly been unusual, like everywhere else. The risks associated with the Covid 19 pandemic forced the Friends of PBLH Board of Directors to make the difficult decision to close the museum, tower and Gift Shop for this season, since we were unwilling to endanger our guests, staff, docents and community. We hope and expect to be back to normal next year.

However, the pandemic also supplied us with a silver lining in the form of a wonderful opportunity to introduce our first ever executive director, Casey Ottinger, to all aspects of PBLH in the summer, but under less-busy-than-usual conditions. Casey brings youthful energy, enthusiasm, vision and ideas to us, and we are thrilled to be able to engage him in many areas. He has welcomed guests to our still-open and available Keepers Apartment, worked with our team on revisions and updates to our website, coordinated with our Board on ongoing educational initiatives, brought fresh approaches to our fundraising efforts and Gift Shop, and much more. We are very excited to have him join our team and hope that our entire community will have the opportunity to meet him soon. (See article on Page 2.)

As indicated, our Keepers Apartment has remained open this season because it is private and able to be thoroughly cleaned between guests. Prior to the summer the apartment got a full makeover, and we could not be more pleased with the results. Board member Gayle Brown, with assistance from Janet Hessler of Betsie Bay Furniture and volunteer Kelly Winter, worked tirelessly to renovate the kitchen, replace aging furniture, repaint and otherwise improve what has become an incredibly desirable destination. We were also fortunate to receive the anonymous donation of some beautiful artwork to help decorate the apartment, including paintings from Peggy Hawley and other local artists. Many thanks to all who helped this effort – your results speak for themselves, and I urge everyone to come out to see our newly improved and beautiful Keepers Apartment or perhaps schedule a stay.

The status of the renovation effort of our deteriorating Shoreline Protection System is covered on Page 3 of this newsletter, and I encourage all to read that report carefully. It is turning out to be significantly more expensive than we had anticipated and puts us in the urgent position of needing to raise more funds to save our beloved Lighthouse. Please join our generous donors to support us.

We look forward to welcoming everyone back to Point Betsie next summer, in what we hope and expect to be a return to normal!

With Best Regards,

The Friends of Point Betsie Lighthouse

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Mission
To support Benzie County in the restoration and maintenance of the Point Betsie Lighthouse facility through advocacy, fundraising and volunteers. Our goal is to promote related educational opportunities for the benefit of all, while maintaining the historical and environmental integrity of the site.

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Meet Casey Ottinger: Point Betsie's First Executive Director

I write to you as the newly appointed executive director of Point Betsie Lighthouse. In a more typical year, I might have met many of you in person. I hope this brief message can provide you with an introduction until we are able to meet. I am continually impressed by the dedication of the community to the efforts at Point Betsie and could not be more honored to become an integral part of that support.



Casey Ottinger

Point Betsie Lighthouse has been a part of my life in the periphery for a couple decades. I had family in the area growing up and made many trips Up North from Indiana to enjoy the local attractions, including Point Betsie. In 2004, when the Lighthouse was transferred to Benzie County and the Friends of Point Betsie began the restoration, I was also undergoing a formative period. I was preparing to head off to college and set the trajectory for my next phase in life. I ended up attending Rollins College in Winter Park, FL, where I studied art history and archeology. It was not my initial intended major, but I felt a deep pull to material history and what we can learn about the human condition from the past. In 2010, when the Lighthouse received the Governor's Award for Historic Preservation, I received my bachelor's degree. Then, both the Friends and I separately turned our eyes to expanding upon what we had accomplished.

Upon graduation I entered the field of international education. I had studied abroad in Athens, Greece, while an undergrad, and was hired by the program I attended to be a traveling representative meeting with U.S. college students interested in expanding their horizons. I was drawn to the transformative possibility of immersive education. It was one thing to study historic locations in textbooks and a completely different experience to be standing within their walls. It changed the way I viewed the past, showing me first hand how it informs the present. I wanted to promote the same experience for others. This led me to pursue my masters degree in international education at New York University and begin my expanded career in 2014. In that same year, Point Betsie completed its new Boat House facility and the Lighthouse experience was transformed into what we recognize today.

During my career in higher education, both in advising international students attending domestic universities and in developing and promoting programs abroad, I acquired a diverse set of skills. I found I had a passion for project management and driving ideas into actions. As we entered 2020, however, I was working on an older property and enjoying the process of restoring and connecting to history once again. It became my goal to combine both pieces of my life about the same time that the Friends of Point Betsie Lighthouse decided it was time to hire their first executive director.

It is an understatement to say that it has been a strange year; a year full of challenges and changes. While many aspects of the year have caused the Board and staff of Point Betsie Lighthouse to alter the expected course of the landmark, it has also provided opportunities to adjust and enhance the work already being done. It has been an interesting yet exciting time to join the effort and learn about the Lighthouse. The pause in action has allowed an opportunity to lay the groundwork for a lot of ideas that have been in gestation for some time. I could not be more excited to be a part of this process and a part of the community supporting Point Betsie Lighthouse.



Casey spent his first summer getting to know Point Betsie's rich history and learning about the tasks (big and small) that come with his new position as executive director.

Point Betsie Repairs Become More Urgent As Lake Levels and Funding Needs Continue to Climb

The current Shoreline Protection System (SPS) at Point Betsie Lighthouse, which dates to 1944, is in urgent need of repair and the recent high-water levels in Lake Michigan continue to make the problem worse. Anyone who visited the Lighthouse this summer could easily see the incredible and additional destruction of the concrete “apron” that separates the Lighthouse from the lake. We had hoped and intended to pair the SPS project with much-needed improvements to our access road, but we recognize that the repairs to the SPS must be our first and immediate priority.

Last summer, after getting a rough estimate of the cost of the SPS repairs in the \$950,000 range, the Friends of Point Betsie Lighthouse Board initiated a \$1 million fundraising campaign. We were pleased to receive contributions of about \$1.2 million. Many thanks, again, to all who have so generously contributed to date. However, after engaging a marine engineering firm to do a formal study of the project, the expected cost has risen substantially. We are currently examining the details of several construction options to decide which will best serve our needs, but even the least expensive choices are in the \$3.5-5.5 million range, with those on the high end in the \$6-9 million range. The options differ primarily in their expected lifespans of effectiveness. We have contacted the various permitting agencies to bring them on-board in the process as early as possible.

After further engineering analysis and refinement of the project scope and goals, we will be able to put the actual work out for bids and determine a total funding target. We are doing this work as quickly as possible, recognizing that erosion and weather-related challenges to the SPS continue daily.

While the revised Capital Campaign details are not yet available, we certainly will need to raise quite a bit more money (between three to 10 times as much as we have to date). To that end, we are attempting to enroll as many foundations, grants, government entities and other participants and interested parties as possible. This project will also require further private and matching funds, so I strongly urge each of you to make the most generous contributions you can. More information will be available on our website as soon as we have it. Feel free to contact Board President Dick Taylor directly with any questions at rtaylor57@gmail.com.



Recent photos show severe damage to Point Betsie Lighthouse's essential Shoreline Protection System (SPS). Photo Credit: Walk Softly Photos.

Recent Contributions to Point Betsie Lighthouse

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Those who climb the winding stairs to the Lighthouse Tower are rewarded with this one-of-a-kind Lake Michigan view!

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It takes many friends, donors and volunteers to keep the light shining at Point Betsie! This photo was taken from the Tower at dusk. The Fog Signal Building and Sleeping Bear Dunes can be seen in the distance.

Become a Friend of Point Betsie Lighthouse!

Point Betsie Lighthouse is maintained through the support of many generous people from near and far who treasure our historic site and the memories made over generations on our sandy beach. Although we believe our decision to close the Lighthouse for the summer was the correct strategy, we unfortunately lost essential revenue from our Gift Shop and public tours. We are also continuing our Capital Campaign, which raises funds to support critical infrastructure repairs that will protect Point Betsie from the rising and ravaging Lake Michigan waters. We need you now more than ever!

There are several ways you can support Point Betsie:

- Purchase individual or family memberships, which help cover operational expenses
- Donate in memory or in honor of a loved one
- Commemorate a special event, such as an anniversary or birthday
- Make a directed contribution to our Capital Campaign

To make a donation please return the enclosed envelope. If you prefer to donate electronically, please visit us at www.pointbetsie.org and click on Support>Make a Contribution. As always, you are welcome to contact us directly via email at pointbetsie@gmail.com. Thank you for your support!



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Of the many photos taken at Point Betsie during the summer this has to be one of our favorites! Thank you Craig Van Wieren for capturing the comet NEOWISE at exactly the right moment. Please find us on Facebook to share photos and memories, enjoy a virtual lighthouse tour or a Point Betsie storytime with our Board Vice President Gayle Brown, and much more!