



Winter 2021

Photo By: Brett Martin

A Message from the President

The rumors you may have heard are true! PBLH was awarded a grant from the State of Michigan for \$5.1 million to help with the urgently needed repairs to our crumbling Shoreline Protection System. We are thrilled and honored as we continue to plan for this complicated project. A full update on the SPS can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

Separately, even given the ongoing challenges posed by the Covid pandemic, PBLH had a fantastic summer. Like virtually every other business, we have had difficulty hiring enough staff. However, our Executive Director Casey Ottinger has done a wonderful job managing this difficult situation. While Covid forced us to keep the tower closed to visitors for a portion of this season, our guided tours of the main lighthouse were extremely well received, and provided guests with a far more informative experience than the previously self-guided tours. We hope and intend to continue them in 2022. Similar to this season, we expect to need docents and tour guides, and if you are so inclined we would welcome new additions to our team next summer.

Our recently renovated Keepers apartment was sold out for the season to rave reviews from our guests. New furnishings, an updated kitchen, and new art and decorating all enhance what was already a gorgeous space. If you can find an open slot, a stay at the apartment is a special treat in a unique setting.

The updates to our Gift Shop have been a huge success too, generating a substantial increase in revenues and also eliciting uniformly rave reviews. Special thanks go out to Kelly Winter and Mica Jones for their vision and hard work re-imagining a full renovation of the space and the displays. They have procured much new and updated merchandise to tempt our guests, now making the Gift Shop a destination unto itself. We are thankful for the hard work of young staffers Sarra Paris, Lucy Reznich, Grace Walrad and Emma Yagle in the shop.

As we transition soon to the off-season, our Gift Shop will be going partly on-line, through our new and improved website, and we thank Bill Cotsworth for his continued hard work on it. The site already has vastly expanded information about all-things-PBLH, and when expanded bandwidth allows will include a sunset webcam. For those snow-birds that miss "Up North" in the off-season, it should provide a good dose.

In short, it has been a wonderful summer. I want to thank our visitors, donors, executive director, staff, volunteers, Board and community for a job well done. I'm looking forward to next summer already, and hope you are too!

With Best Regards,

Dick Taylor

The Friends of Point Betsie Lighthouse

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Frankfort, Michigan 49635

(231) 352-7644 | www.pointbetsie.org

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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Point Betsie Volunteers Bring History to Life

It takes a community to restore and operate a lighthouse. Many volunteers are responsible not only for making Point Betsie the beloved and historic local treasure it is today, but for helping keep it open to the public from May to October.



Photo by Jeff Weir

continued as a docent through this past season, using the knowledge he gained during his research to influence the tours he conducts.

He says “meeting people from all over the world who come to Northern Michigan” is one of his favorite volunteer benefits.

“Knowing maritime history, the history of navigation and sailing in general, helps explain the reasons for and rationale behind the creation and continued maintenance of the iconic connections to our mercantile and technologic past,” he said. Sharing that history in a few minutes is both a challenge and a great reward for all the years of research.”

This past summer was Jan Fiola’s first volunteer experience at Point Betsie. Although her family has deep emotional connections to the Lighthouse (with one daughter becoming engaged there), the recent retiree hadn’t considered volunteering until a friend was sidelined after a surgery and was unable to put in her usual hours at Point Betsie.

“I asked her what I could do to help,” said Jan, thinking she might be asked to bring a dinner or run errands. “But my friend said, ‘I want you to work at Point Betsie.’”

Jan immediately took a liking to her “temporary” volunteer role and stayed on for the balance of the season, working a regular two-hour shift each week as a docent in the lighthouse. Her professional background in architecture helped fuel an interest in the historic buildings on the grounds and how they have evolved over time to meet shifting needs.

“I bought books and have been reading and studying and learning from our guests,” she said. “I enjoyed it so much more than I ever expected to.

“Just being in that beautiful space, when the sun is shining and the breeze is blowing through the windows, is enough to make we want to serve again next year.”

Are you interested in serving Point Betsie as a volunteer in 2022? Please reach out to us at staff@pointbetsie.org or complete our volunteer form at www.pointbetsie.org/volunteer.

“Point Betsie remains so special to many people in our community. It is our hope to tap into that passion by providing volunteer opportunities where individuals can share what the lighthouse means to them. This expands every visitor’s experience at Point Betsie Lighthouse and broadens the staff understanding of what makes this space so beloved.” says Executive Director Casey Ottinger.

Since the Friends of Point Betsie was formed in 2002, volunteers have been a necessary lifeline. Although a full-time, year-round executive director and growing professional staff have helped lighten the volunteer load in recent years, many critical tasks continue to be handled or staffed mostly by volunteers. These include docent shifts in the Lighthouse, work in the gift shop, handyman tasks in the facilities and on the grounds, and fundraising, among others.

Frankfort resident Bruce Ogilvie has helped over many seasons to tackle a range of volunteer tasks, the first of which was his successful effort in 2005 to organize Frankfort Rotary Club volunteers to support the Friends’ ambitious restoration plans. Several years later he was asked to prepare materials about the history of Point Betsie as well as the general maritime history of the Manitou Passage. (His work was featured in the popular book about Point Betsie written by former Friends Board President Jon Hawley.) He was later contacted by the Friends to become a docent in the Lighthouse, filling in during lunch time for the paid staff. He has



Photo by Jeff Weir

A Summer 2021 Retrospective

While we were thrilled to be open this summer at Point Betsie Lighthouse, 2021 was a unique season that makes comparison reporting a bit difficult. The Lighthouse opened about a month later than usual and the Gift Shop opened a few weeks later due to an update to the space. While these delays were necessary, they had an impact on our season as a whole. However, if you compare our season to the same window of time in 2019, we saw an increase in tour ticket and merchandise sales.

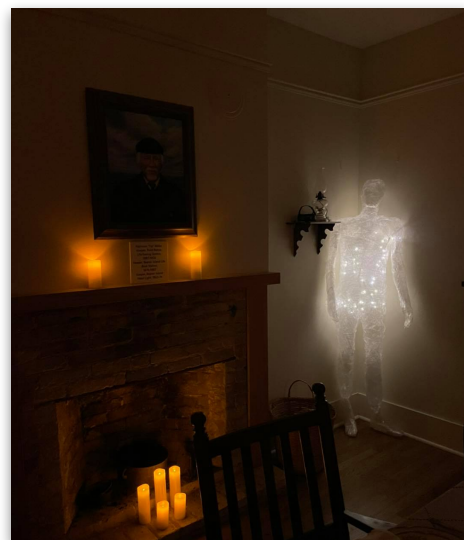
Visitors were ready to make the most of our open doors and we hosted up to 260 touring guests in a single day. This does not account for the number of guests that roamed our grounds without taking a tour. We saw an increase in group tours and hosted several senior bus tours, field trips, and special interest groups.

Our most successful day in the Gift Shop saw a return of over \$1,000 more than the record day in 2019.

The addition of a 'Seasonal Sale' allowed us to move surplus merchandise from our closed 2020 season and draw new visitors out to the Lighthouse. We hope to host this event on an annual basis to ensure that we no longer hold on to inventory for an extended length of time.

We hosted a record number of weddings in 2021. Our weddings are limited to 50 guests due to space constraints, but 2021 saw an increase in couples seeking smaller ceremonies. We are looking to expand our event and wedding offerings in the future.

To close out our season we added a Halloween Ghost Tour during the final weekends of October. Guests were regaled with the ghost stories of the lighthouses along the western shore of Lake Michigan. We decorated to get into the festive spirit and served warming Fall refreshments. The vast majority of tours sold out with only limited promotion. The success of this event

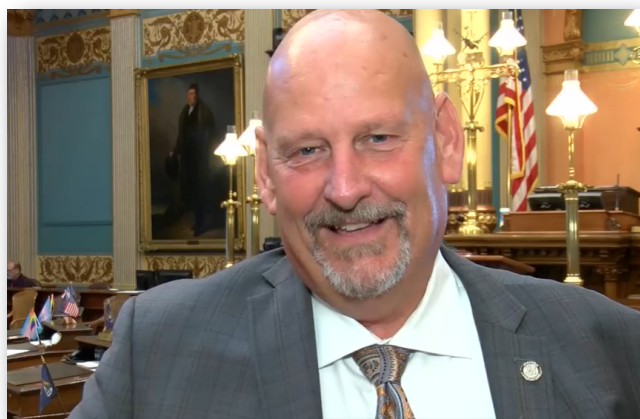


The Ghostly Dining Room during our Ghost Tour

has led us to add it to our annual offerings.

We have many exciting things planned for next year. We look forward to opening on May 14, 2022.

A Major Step for our Shoreline Protection System



State Senator Curt VanderWall speaks from the floor following the passing of the budget

Fortunately, with strong support from Senator Curt VanderWall, the recently approved State of Michigan budget includes \$5.1 million for the Point Betsie SPS repairs! We cannot thank Senator VanderWall enough for his help and persistence. Since we will not have firm construction cost estimates until next summer, it cannot be known whether or not the funds raised to date, totaling about \$6.5 million, will be sufficient to complete the project or not. It is possible, even likely, that a further Capital Campaign will be required next summer. Stay tuned. However, we are very pleased with the progress to date, and particularly thrilled and thankful for the recent large grant from the State. Very good news indeed!

The Shoreline Protection System at Point Betsie was last repaired in 1944, so is overdue for further attention, and the recent high water level in Lake Michigan has made those repairs even more urgent. After an initial preliminary examination in 2019 suggested that repairs might cost in the range of \$1 million, a successful Capital Campaign was launched that raised over \$1.3 million. A subsequent engineering study provided greater detail about what the project will entail, along with several options of courses of action, and substantially higher cost estimates. The preferred option includes a rock-wall "revetment," which requires confirmation that the lake bottom will be sufficiently supportive. A marine engineering firm has just been selected for that study, and work will commence in the spring. Following that, approvals will be needed from several regulatory bodies, prior to the solicitation of bids for the actual repair work. Preliminary cost estimates for the project range to over \$8 million, although the final price cannot be known until these bids come back next summer. The construction is targeted to begin in spring of 2023.

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Photo by Jay Burt



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Photo by Alan Walter

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Josephine Vaughan in memory of Julie, Laura, and Chuck

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Photo by Gary Ennis



Photo by Christi Northam

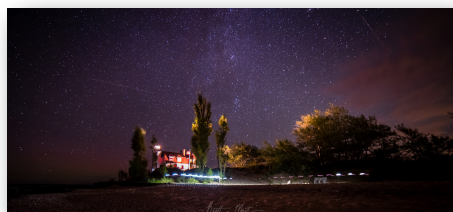


Photo by Brett Martin



Photo by Craig Seaver

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 of 2020 and to keep our tour closed for a portion of 2021 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 rising and ravaging Lake Michigan waters. We need you 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
- Make a directed contribution to our Capital Campaign

To make a donation please return the enclosed envelop. 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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Stay in touch with us even while the lighthouse is closed! Visit us on Facebook and Instagram and engage with the online Point Betsie Lighthouse community. Keep an eye on our website for additional updates. We have many exciting additions planned and will be making announcements on our online platforms. We look forward to seeing you in person after May 14, 2022!