



Joan Taft, center, delivers a fresh flower arrangement to the library staff every Monday morning.
Photo by Michaela Kennedy

Flowers add a touch of class to the library

By Michaela Kennedy

For the last 10 years or so, anyone wandering into the Jamestown Philomenian Library has been greeted with a beautiful flower arrangement at the front desk. The tradition is maintained with a fresh bouquet every Monday, and we have local floral artist Joan Taft to thank.

Taft, a native Newporter who summered in Jamestown her whole life, moved here with her husband after retiring. A library volunteer, Taft remembered how the tradition began. "I had an extra arrangement from a funeral," she said. She brought the flowers over to the library that day and ever since has kept up the practice. "When I worked in Hingham Library, they had flowers on the desk. I thought that was nice," Taft added.

Taft showed amusement that people will feel the flowers to see

if they are real. "I sometimes mix the flowers with silk ones," she confided.

Library Director Judith Bell expressed gratitude for Taft's dedication to the library over the years. She remembered that Taft had been working as a volunteer for at least as long as Bell has been there, which is 20 years. "It makes me feel like I'm in the New York Metropolitan Museum, that we get a fresh flower arrangement every week," Bell said about the colorful display.

Library staff members agreed with Bell that getting the arrangements every week was quite special. "It's the most positive comment we get here at the library," said Lisa Davis, who works at the library. The librarians enjoy sharing with Taft feedback on her arrangements. Diane Wright, also a librarian, added, "We love Joan."

Keeper's house should not be affordable housing unit

By Dotti Farrington

The Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association has continued to press its multi-year effort to convince town officials to abandon or limit its use of the lighthouse keeper's residence as affordable housing.

The association has been pursuing its goal as the Town Council moves to install a new tenant at the keeper's house. they are also dealing with of whether the town can accept the tenant's offer to remove lead paint there.

The issues were discussed at council meetings this summer, and data to resolve the paint removal issue is due this month.

The council has not taken direct action on the association's appeal, but has considered its goals as part of the actions related to the lighthouse. The council has also determined that the lighthouse, while being an affordable housing facility, is not considered a permanent item in the town's affordable housing inventory.

The town's Affordable Housing Committee wants to retain the keeper's residence as part of the inadequate stock of such housing on the island. The councilors have not defined how long-term they intend to continue the affordable designation for the keeper's house.

The Affordable Housing Committee assumed a role in the renting of the keeper's quarters some years ago, when it created requirements for tenants, including the tenant's ability to maintain the historic facilities of which the residence is part. The rules specify that no tenant should occupy the apartment for more than three

years. It was explained when the rules were developed that the affordable status is meant to encourage the tenant to move into standard housing and make room for another tenant to make use of the status.

The committee wants to retain the affordable designation because the town is far behind the statutory requirement that 10 percent of the town's housing be affordable.

There had been several sources of support to extend the renting arrangement to the outgoing tenant, Richard Shutt, because of his particularly commendable maintenance of the premises. The council decided, however, to adhere to the three-year cycle for renting.

Lighthouse future

As it prepares to work toward full management of the lighthouse when the U.S. Coast Guard decides to divest itself of the property as federal surplus, the lighthouse museum association wants the affordable designation discontinued. The association is convinced that Beavertail will be available within a few years, with non-profit organizations given first choice for accepting the lighthouse. It is concerned that a long-term lease, such as the three-year plan under the affordable status, will complicate the long-range plans.

The lighthouse museum association became involved with Beavertail in 1993, and Town Planner Lisa Bryer has been liaison for preservation goals of the association for about two years. She has also been continuing her role on working for affordable

housing.

A formal plan for takeover is in the works, including a covenant agreement with the federal government for expansion of the museum. This work is being done as part of the museum's application for transfer of ownership initiated under the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000.

The association is committed to preserving the light station as a historic national and state landmark and providing public access for education because of the lighthouse's long-continued operation. The lighthouse is a major tourist destination and considered the most photographed scene in Rhode Island.

Through the National Park Service, the federal government is expected to declare 300 light stations as excess over the next decade. The lighthouse museum association is working with local and state officials to identify an operational and contractual plan for the site's future, with the association to be managing and operating an expanded lighthouse museum.

The association lists at least nine agencies with vested interests in the site: the U.S. Coast Guard, the National Parks and General services; the state environmental, parks, recreation, economic development, tourism and preservation agencies; and local interests, which include the town, the lighthouse museum association and the Jamestown Historical Society.

The 7.35-acre lighthouse property is federally owned and governed in part under a five-year renewal lease with the town involving the lighthouse, related buildings, and 4 acres of land. Lease arrangements affect the keeper's quarters, used by a cus-

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-Thomas Jefferson, writing in 1816

For more detailed commentary, call 423-0400 to obtain a copy of Mark Kurfansky's excellent essay on this topic.

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