

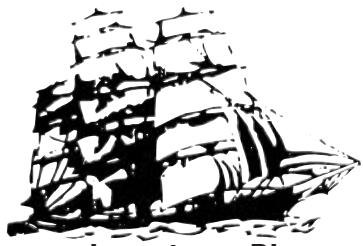
# Narragansett Café

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## A face lift for a historic nautical beacon

By Erin Tiernan

The steady beacon at Conanicut Island's southernmost tip is becoming a little rough around the edges. Cracked plaster, leaky roofs and a wind-whipped exterior are the marks of age and a colorful history at Beavertail Lighthouse. With over 250 years service, the lighthouse has come to mean more than just a navigational symbol on Jamestown, it is a manifestation of a New England town's significance.

The 64-foot-tall light tower, resurrected in 1856, is the third reconstruction of the lighthouse at Beavertail. Upon completion of the first lighthouse in 1749, Beavertail became the site of the third light tower ever erected in what would later be known as the United States of America. That began a longstanding historical tradition of innovation in navigational aids

that the current keepers of the light are trying to preserve.

A group of volunteers ranging in age from 17 to 80 assumed responsibility for the lighthouse museum and adjacent dwellings in 1993, establishing the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association. In 1972, an automated rotating light was installed and in 1989, the necessity of an on-site keeper was negated, allowing the BLMA to embark on its mission of education and open a small museum.

The museum exists in the modest three rooms of the old assistant keeper's house. It is packed with the rich history of experiments conducted at the lighthouse in the fields of optics and lenses, audiology and fog signals and compressions. The exhibitions are sprinkled with tales of shipwrecks and historic battles in public policy.

There just isn't enough room right now for exhibits to reflect the leading role of Beavertail Lighthouse in historical developments of navigation technology throughout time. "I think the entire site should be devoted to exhibits and convening space for people interested in history and in the history of lighthouses," said Lanette Macaruso, fundraising chairperson for BLMA.

A three-phase restoration project aimed at repairing damage and updating the buildings, expanding the museum space and developing the curatorial and educational experiences of the exhibits over the next three to four years is in the

works.

"The significant thing is that we've got this major restoration going on now," said Varoujan Karantz, who has been a BLMA board member for seven years. "And that really is the first step in our involvement to seeing the museum expand into all of the buildings."

Entirely financed by grants and donations, the total costs of restorations and expansions are expected to exceed \$327,000. Repairs will move slowly as money becomes available, but Macaruso said she is confident they will be able to raise the necessary funds and they plan to commence a fundraising campaign in June of this year. "We're new at this and it's been a very grassroots effort. When you tap into the history you get lots of people to get passionate about it. What I'm finding is that so many people, when you tell them about Beavertail, they say they never knew all of that (history)."

Save the buildings, as phase one is affectionately known, is set to be completed by mid-October so efforts can focus on museum expansions and enrichment. Karantz said they are working with the Rhode Island-based company ABCORE Restoration to meet their goals.

The enthusiasm of the BLMA volunteers transcends dedication. These new keepers of the light see their duties clearly: to preserve and to share. Membership cur-

See "Lighthouse" on page 11

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