
Posted on Sun, Sep. 24, 2006

Lighthouse maker grants Tionesta its shining moment

By Jim Carroll
Erie Times-News

TIONESTA -- There are plenty of lighthouse aficionados -- people who visit lighthouses, read about them, collect replicas.

Then there is Jack Sherman, someone who actually built one.

The Sherman Memorial Lighthouse -- Pennsylvania's newest lighthouse -- recently opened to visitors. But unlike the state's three other working lighthouses, this one isn't sitting on the shores of Lake Erie.

Instead, this lighthouse is on a 22.5-acre island in the Allegheny River, about 60 miles southeast of Erie. It is opening in time to help the Forest County community of Tionesta, where it is located, celebrate its 150th birthday this year.

The lighthouse, with a working lantern, is a dream come true for Sherman, a 68-year-old Tionesta businessman.

"This community has been good to me, and I'm one of those people who believe in giving back," said Sherman, who owns Allegheny Valley Development.

Combine that desire to give back to his community -- with a desire to preserve his family heritage and a love of lighthouses -- and you get a new community landmark.

The 75-foot-high lighthouse sits on a 25-foot-high mound of soil on what was once called Hunters Island, but is now called Lighthouse Island.

Sherman started construction three years ago.

"All of a sudden we turned around and there was this lighthouse," said Joan Wallace, president of the Forest Area Arts Council. "It was a little startling at first."

"We are looking at it now as our newest landmark," said Wallace, a former technical writer who helped assemble information for the opening and dedication of the lighthouse. "It is just a beautiful structure. It is really a lovely piece of architecture."

Most lighthouses are more functional than decorative inside, but Sherman's is different. It is finished and decorated as a showcase for family memorabilia and to display his collection of more than 280 lighthouse replicas.

"I got interested in lighthouses about 10 years ago," he said. "I have been in many of them."

The octagon-shaped tower is made of timber instead of masonry or concrete. The 25-foot-high aluminum and glass lantern room is equipped with the kind of beacon that a small regional airport would use. There are 76 steps in the spiral stairs that lead up the tower.

Sherman came up with the conceptual design. Riverbend Timber Frames is the company that did the construction blueprints. Sherman said the lighthouse represented a "substantial" investment, but he declined to say how much it cost.

During the lighthouse's opening, the Tionesta Sesquicentennial Committee hosted an afternoon of events to coincide with the lighthouse dedication. The next round of tours is scheduled for Oct. 7.