

# Historical significance gives lighthouse tourist appeal

ONTARIO FROM P. 13

Such was the fate of the Point Breeze tower. Built in 1871 at the end of one of two 1,600-foot-long piers guarding the dredged mouth of the Oak Orchard River, it was decommissioned in 1905. Pilings under the piers were washed away in 1914 and a gale-force storm sent the lighthouse tumbling down on Dec. 28, 1916.

Point Breeze's popularity slipped away with it. The first white settlers crossed here from Canada in 1803. By 1900, there were shipbuilders, resort hotels and excursion steamers ferrying vacationers from Batavia, Buffalo and beyond. They came by horse-drawn carriage or in six trains stopping daily in Carlton, a town that incorporates Point Breeze.

Recreational angling brought back some bustle a half-century ago. With about 200 residents today, Point Breeze is outnumbered by boat slips, its six marinas an anchor for lake charters and inland fly fishing.

But much of surrounding Orleans County remains in economic straits, said marina owner Peg Wiley, a 2002 transplant from Rochester who saw potential in tapping the region's rich maritime past. Learning of a failed 1970s effort to build a replica, she and fellow enthusiasts raised \$200,000 to see it through.

A Rochester construction firm, Nathaniel General, dusted off 1909 Coast Guard blueprints and brought in a specialized carpentry team run by Dan Snyder and his son, Ian.

The carpenters are experienced in mortise-and-tenon joinery, which was used in constructing the pyramidal tower at the foot of one of the twin piers, which were rebuilt in 1975.

"It takes old skills to accomplish," Snyder said.

The lighthouse, with cedar walls and a steel-and-glass lantern room, sits in a state marine park with boat launches, picnic tables and eateries. A dedication ceremony is planned for August. There are plans to build a museum featuring video footage of recently discovered Lake Ontario shipwrecks such as the twin-masted *Milan*, which sank off Point Breeze in 1849.

"I grant you, lighthouses for the most part probably



AP Photo/DAVID DUPREY  
Dan Snyder works inside a lighthouse replica that is under construction along Lake Ontario in Point Breeze, N.Y.

aren't terribly necessary for anybody running GPS in their boats, which most everybody does now," said retired teacher Dick Anderson, president of a nonprofit group that will maintain the lighthouse and museum.

Lighthouses have enduring appeal because of their historic significance as a safety beacon for mariners and

their often inspiring or dramatic settings "on points, on rocks, in dangerous locations for shipping," said Chad Kaiser of the U.S. Lighthouse Society.

Even before its completion in May, the novelty and nostalgia of the newest lighthouse drew gawkers.

"It's exciting, it really is, to have something like that back," said Lisa Hodges, 57, a nurse who drove up from Albion, the county seat.

Potential traffic jams — and New York state allocating \$110,000 in preservation grants — have brought grumbling from "some residents who like the old ways," said Bill Karcher, whose year-old Lighthouse Restaurant on the Point has extended from Friday night fish fries to weekend hours with live music.

But for local retailers, "this really is helping already," he said.

"Some people want to see things stay as they are, but it's not realistic," interjected Wiley, bemoaning the county's steady slide in population to around 40,000 and its dearth of thriving new businesses.

For a long time, tourists have been sparse here "because we haven't really had anything for them to show up for," she said. "But now we do."

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