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New life for Hospital Point Lighthouse in Beverly

By Bobby Gates / RGATES@CNC.COM

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Beverly, Mass. - The Hospital Point Lighthouse in Beverly has kept ships safely away from the shore along the Cove neighborhood since 1872.

But now, more members of the public may be guided safely inside the lighthouse under a new agreement between local volunteers and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Last month the local branch of the Coast's Guard's auxiliary signed a so-called memorandum of agreement with the Guard that will allow the public to get guided tours of the lighthouse by a trained team of auxiliary members.

The chairman of the lighthouse team and commander of the auxiliary's Beverly flotilla, Phil Karwowski, said the agreement formalizes the Hospital Point Lighthouse tour program.

"It opens the door to having it open more often. That's the key," he said.

The team has 18 members, with about half of them living in Beverly. The others are from local North Shore communities - they are all volunteers.

"We all do it because we love working with the Coast Guard and the lighthouse," Karwowski said.

The lighthouse sits at the end of Bayview Avenue alongside a Coast Guard owned residence where the sector commander resides. It's named after the smallpox hospital that once sat on the site.

The biggest difference in tours will be that instead of active duty Coast Guard members conducting the tours - some who are from other areas of the country and are stationed here for a few years - it will be local residents who are members of the auxiliary. Many of them learned the names of all the offshore islands as a child. They can name all the lighthouses in view. Plus, they are researching the history of the lighthouse and a Revolutionary War fort on the site and combing through the lighthouse keeper's logs.

"We're a set team," said Karwowski, who said he wasn't sure how many tours the group may conduct in the first year.

The tour guides will explain the history of the light and how the Fresnel lens - one of only four of the original lenses still in use in a Massachusetts lighthouse today - works. They'll help people navigate the 40 stairs inside the lighthouse and guide them up the seven-step ladder to a hatch that takes visitors into the lantern room.

"From there they have great views of Beverly and Salem harbors and the lighthouses in the area," Karwowski said.

Previously, the lighthouse had only been open for a day or two during Homecoming in the summer. More recently, lighthouse tours had been added to the Essex National Heritage Commission's Trails and Sails weekend in the fall. It will be open for both events this year, with the auxiliary running the tours.

"There is someone who lives there so we have to be cognizant of that," Karwowski said.

Any group that is interested in arranging a tour of the lighthouse is asked to contact Karwowski via e-mail at philkarw@comcast.net.

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