

Restoration work begins on WWII tower

First step in \$2 million project at state park's Towers Beach



A pile of bricks lies at the feet of Cindy Todd, construction project administrator for Delaware State Parks, and Pierce Thompson, site manager for the division, as they look at the condition of the tower at Tower Road. CHRIS FLOOD PHOTO

By Chris Flood - July 31, 2017

More than a decade in the planning, restoration work began July 24 on the World War II fire control tower at Delaware Seashore State Park's Towers Beach.

"This is exciting," said Bob Frederick, former Dewey Beach mayor and member of the Fort Miles Historical Association, as a backhoe dumped dirt into the back of a dump truck. "It gives you goose bumps."

A collaboration among Delaware Seashore Preservation Foundation, Fort Miles Historical Association and Delaware State Parks, restoration of the tower, once used to locate enemy vessels offshore, is part of a larger scheme to interest visitors in the history of the state parks along the beach.

The foundation is funding the project, but similar to restoration work at Fort Miles in Cape Henlopen State Park, the parks department is doing the work.

Gary Wray, president of the Fort Miles Historical Association, said 5 million people a year drive by the tower, just south of Dewey, and the Route 1 sign promoting it. The goal of the \$2 million restoration project, he said, is to get passersby interested in its history, which will spur interest in Fort Miles in Cape Henlopen State Park.

Wray said Delaware is the only state in the country that still has its fire control towers. He said other states built towers with wood and steel, but in Delaware, concrete was used because it was faster.

"Three times as expensive, but faster," he said.

Wray said an engineering study a few years ago said the 58-foot tower is as sound structurally today as it was when it was first built.

"It's in perfect condition," he said.

Cindy Todd, construction project administrator for Delaware State Parks, was on hand to see



Kent Construction's Ron Summers and Mike Derrickson run a string before work can begin on a new sidewalk. CHRIS FLOOD PHOTO

the restoration begin. This phase, she said, includes a sidewalk that circles the tower and connects the two Tower Road parking lots, installation of blue-tinted lighting similar to the lighting at the Indian River Inlet bridge, and, most importantly, a glass door over the once bricked-up entrance to the tower.

The door will allow information panels inside the tower, where people will see what life was like in the towers during WWII, Todd said, adding the sidewalk should take about a week, the glass door another week and about a month to finishing the lighting.

The goal, she said, is to be able to get people all the way to the top using ladders or stairs.

Wray said, ultimately, the project will include a nice pavilion connecting the tower and the bath house located at Towers Beach. The idea is, he said, this sidewalk and glass door will get people talking about the rest of the campaign.

“It’s ambitious, but when it’s done, it will be quite the draw,” he said.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Our story should have said Delaware is the only state that still has ALL of its fire control towers. Gary Wray, who was quoted in the story, clarified that other states do indeed have some of their towers, but only Delaware has all of them.



Gary Wray, president of the Fort Miles Historical Association, and Bob Frederick, former Dewey Beach mayor and member of the Fort Miles Historical Association, hold up a rendering of how the Tower Road pavilion will look when the \$2 million project is complete. CHRIS FLOOD PHOTO

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