

# Cape Gazette

Covering Delaware's Cape Region

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## Fire control Tower 3 opens to the public

World War II artifact restored south of Dewey Beach



As the first officials to walk to the top of fire control Tower 3, Gov. John Carney, left, gives the lay of the land to Maj. Gen. Robert Edmonson. In back are (l-r) Sen. Russ Huxtable, D-Lewes; Rep. Ron Gray, R-Selbyville; and Division of Parks and Recreation Director Ray Bivens. The restored World War II tower was officially opened April 19. RON MACARTHUR PHOTOS

Ron MacArthur

April 21, 2023

Another World War II fire control tower is open to the public.

Officials, volunteers, state parks staff and two World War II veterans joined for a special ceremony April 19 to officially open Tower 3 in Delaware Seashore State Park at the Towers Beach bathhouse just south of Dewey Beach off Route 1.

“These World War II-era towers are iconic landmarks of Delaware’s coastline,” said Gov. John Carney. “I’m glad that Tower 3 has been preserved so future generations can learn about Delaware’s history while enjoying our beautiful state parks.”

The Delaware Seashore Preservation Foundation spearheaded the effort back in 2006, when a structural engineer found the tower to be in great condition. The foundation's Save the Tower campaign eventually raised \$467,000.

The tower had been left in a state of disrepair. Sand had to be removed just to access the door. In 2017, Fort Miles Historical Association’s Bunker Busters volunteers took on the task to clean out nearly 5 tons of compacted bird waste. They ended up volunteering 1,500 hours to the project.

Funding for the \$1.7 million project also included \$300,000 in community transportation funds from Sussex legislators and \$500,000 from the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control.

Foundation President Larry Brown said the project was a joint venture and groups such as the Fort Miles Historical Association were key to its success.

DNREC Division of Parks and Recreation Director Ray Bivens said when he took office, Gov. John Carney told him that emphasis should be on taking care of the state’s historical features. “What we have here is an example of that. This tower has been standing here since World War II,” he said. “Now it will be a monument for all of those who served in World War II.”

DNREC Secretary Shawn Garvin said the towers were built between 1939 and 1942 and have stood the test of time. He said wooden forms were constructed and filled with a continuous pour of concrete for 24 hours. The towers were part of the Fort Miles defense system, which included 11 along the Delaware coast and four in New Jersey.

Visitors to Towers Beach can now walk up the 57-foot tower and nearly 100 spiral steps to the top.

“Many people have been waiting for the day they can walk to the top of Tower 3. We are honored and proud to preserve this piece of Delaware’s World War II history and excited for visitors to learn about and enjoy it,” Garvin said.

He said visitors who scale the tower can see views of the ocean, beach, dunes and Inland Bays. “The wetlands visible to the south are some of the most productive ecosystems on the planet, right here in Delaware,” he said.

Construction was led by Delmarva Veterans Builders and included installation of modern features along with restoration of the tower’s ladders; installation of an entry ramp and sidewalk; a metal spiral staircase to the top; lighting; a fire alarm system; replacement of windows on the bottom level; a handrail and netting system at the top for safety; and interpretive elements that will enable the public to understand the role fire control towers played in World War II. A separate project to pave the Towers Beach parking lot and replace its bathhouse ramp was also recently completed.

#### **World War II vets**

Honored guests included World War II veterans and Sussex Countians Ernie Marvel, 99, and Herb Faulls, 103; the family of the late Gary Wray, Fort Miles Historical Association co-founder; U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Robert Edmonson II, commander of Aberdeen Proving Grounds; and William Grayson, author of the book “Delaware’s Ghost Towers: The Coast Artillery’s Forgotten Last Stand During the Darkest Days of World War II.”

#### **Tower trivia**

Tower 7 in Cape Henlopen State Park is also open to the public. The park is also home to the Fort Miles Museum.

Tower 3 was lit with nine cobalt blue lights (matching the lights on Indian River Inlet Bridge) during a ceremony in February 2018.

Crews of eight men from Fort Miles manned each tower. They were used to not only observe the coastline, but to triangulate locations of potential enemy ships for Fort Miles guns to fire on. No enemy ships were ever fired on.



Tower 3 in Delaware Seashore State Park is the second one open to the public. The tower has been restored with new steps, lighting, historical signage and a new platform at the top.





Elected officials and guests cut a ribbon to officially open Tower 3 during an April 19 ceremony. Among those taking part are (l-r) Maj. Gen. Robert Edmonson; World War II veteran Ernie Marvel; Lt. Gov. Bethany Hall-Long; World War II veteran Herb Faulls; Gov. John Carney; and DNREC Secretary Shawn Garvin.



Two local World War II veterans attend the ceremony. Herb Faulls, left, who is 103 years old, entered the war in 1944. Ernie Marvel, who is 99 years old, was drafted in 1943 and served in France and advanced to Germany.



Tower 3, off Route 1 north near Dewey Beach in Delaware Seashore State Park, is one of 15 towers used for Fort Miles defenses – 11 in Delaware and four in New Jersey.





The view toward the ocean from atop Tower 3 in Delaware Seashore State Park near Dewey Beach is one of the best views in coastal Sussex County.



Maj. Gen. Robert Edmonson looks at a French medal presented to World War II veteran Ernie Marvel, right, as fellow veteran Herb Fauls looks on.





Gov. John Carney thanks the volunteers and state staff who combined their efforts to restore the tower.



DNREC Secretary Shawn Garvin holds his notes up as “old school” after Gov. John Carney said he couldn’t read his notes on an iPad because of sun glare.



Larry Brown, president of the Delaware Seashore Preservation Committee, thanks his fellow members for their efforts in the Save the Tower campaign to raise \$467,000 toward the restoration project.





Lt. Gov. Bethany Hall-Long, who has her roots in nearby Bethany Beach, is also related to World War II veteran Ernie Marvel.



Maj. Gen. Robert Edmonson, commander of Aberdeen Proving Grounds, talks about the legacy of Fort Miles.





Members of the Harbor Defense bring their World War II equipment to the ceremony.



Delaware Division of Parks and Recreation Director Ray Bivens, left, welcomes World War II veteran Herb Faulls.





The Delaware Seashore State Park bathhouse has a new parking lot and handicapped-accessible ramp.



The view looking north toward Route 1 and Delaware Bay from the top of Tower 3.





The Towers Beach bathhouse has a new handicapped-accessible ramp, as well as a new parking lot.