

Groups combine to save a silent sentinel along Delaware coast

Fund drive under way to restore Dewey tower

By Ron MacArthur
Cape Gazette staff

For more than 65 years 11 silent sentinels have guarded the coast.

Most people are not aware of the unique history surrounding the fire-control towers assigned to Fort Miles; many are under the mistaken impression they were gun emplacements.

Two volunteer organizations are joining forces to open a tower in Dewey Beach in an effort to educate the public about the critical role they played during World War II.

The tower will be restored to its World War II condition and be open for tours. In addition, it will serve as a location for a World War II memorial to store a database listing World War II veterans as part of an interactive display.

The only tower now open to the public is the 75-foot tower in Cape Henlopen State Park.

The tower is in good shape, said Gary Wray, president of the Fort Miles Historical Association. "The tower is about 99 percent the way it was when it was built in 1942," Wray said.

"The big-ticket item is Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility - bringing everything up to 2007 code," he said.

That doesn't mean an elevator or chairlift to the top of the tower, however, Wray said. "We are not quite sure what we will have to do, but we have to be ready," Wray said.

It may mean providing handicapped access to the tower and some sort of video monitoring system at the base for people to get a view from the top.

He said all of the towers, which were built with a continuous pour of concrete over rebar, were built by men from Delaware who put their heart and soul into the work. The Delaware Seashore Preservation Foundation and the Fort Miles Historical Association kicked off a fund drive Wednesday, Oct. 10, to restore Tower 3, located just off Route 1 in Delaware Seashore State Park in Dewey Beach.

Shirley Price, one of the co-chairs of the project, said she was among those growing up with misinformation about the historic structures that mark the Cape Region coastline.

"The silent giants still stand today and we are going to bring one back to life," she said.

The goal of the two groups is to raise \$500,000 and get the project completed within seven years.



Shirley Price, a co-chair of the fund drive to restore Tower 3, speaks about the importance of maintaining the historic towers.

"Hopefully, we will get started on the project and get done much quicker, but it all depends on how quickly we raise the money," Price said. She said money would also be set aside in the Delaware Community Foundation for operating costs and maintenance.

Ernie Felici, vice chairman of the Delaware Seashore Preservation Foundation, said he had the opportunity to get to the top of the tower during the engineering study. "It was an inspiring experience - an experience we want to share with everyone," he said.

On a good day, the view from the top will be more than 14 miles.

Wray said the opening of the tower will create a destination for Dewey Beach. "It will put the focus on the towers, but also honor our World War II vets," he said. Tower 3 is 64 feet high and along with Tower 4, which is 900 feet to its north, served Battery 519 and Battery Smith at Fort Miles. It was constructed at a cost of \$17,900 in 1942.

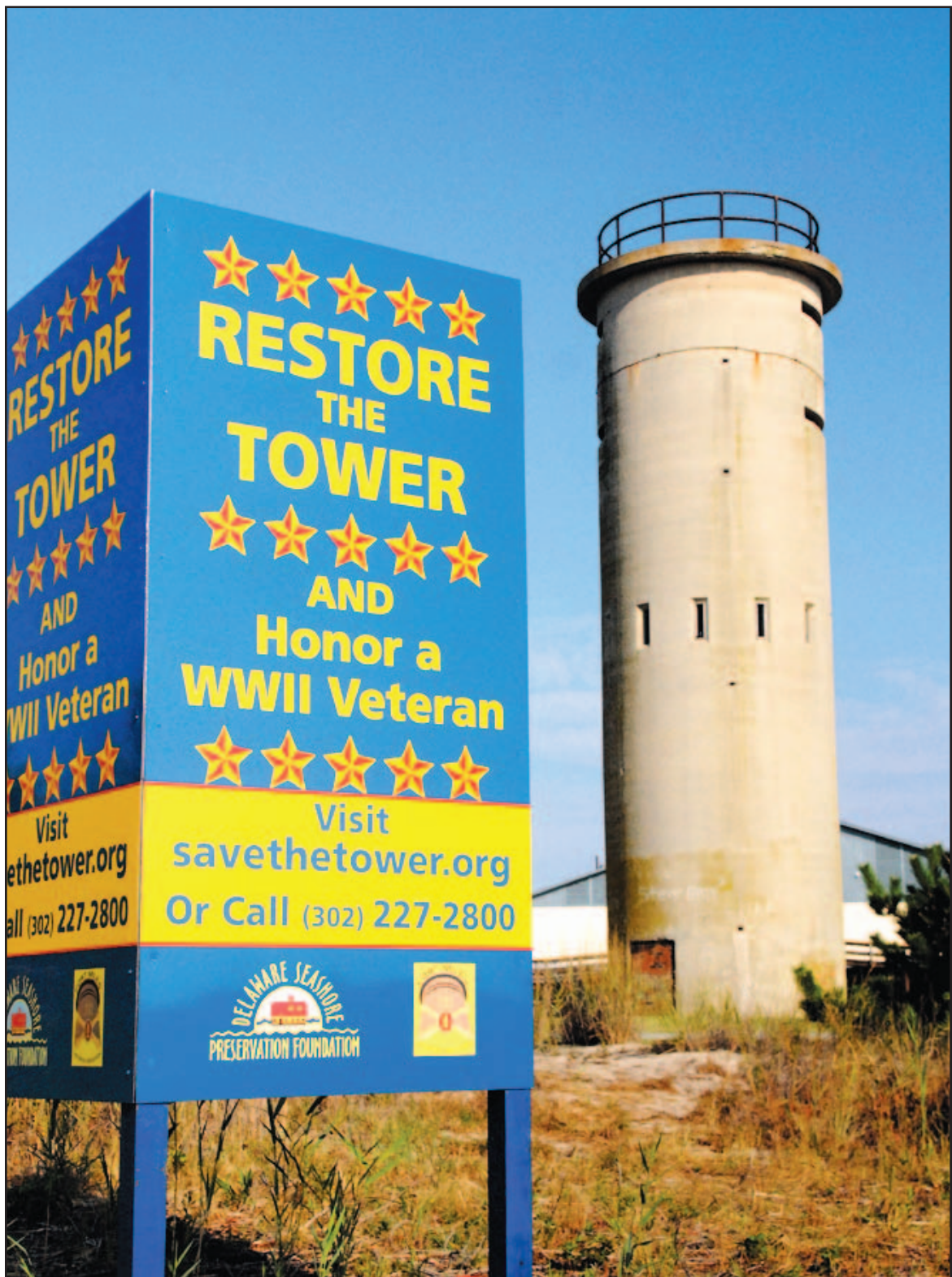
A total of 13 fire control towers were built - 11 in Delaware and two in New Jersey - between 1939 and 1942 in support of the gun emplacements at Fort Miles. "The towers were the eyes of the fort," Wray said.

Soldiers stationed in the towers used basic geometry to spot and plot ships to line them up for artillery fire, hence "fire control" towers.

The five donation levels are \$1,000, \$500, \$350, \$100 and \$50. For a minimum donation of \$350, contributors will have the opportunity to list a World War II veteran's name in the database, which will become part of the interactive program honoring those who served.

For more information, phone 227-2800 or go to the website at www.savethetower.org.

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A sign along Route 1 near Dewey Beach announces the drive under way to restore Tower 3 and establish a World War II memorial.



At left, Gary Wray, president of the Fort Miles Historical Association, talks about the history of Tower 3 during a ceremony Wednesday, Oct. 10, to kick off a restoration fund drive.

At right, Tower 3 in Dewey Beach is reflected in a pool of water. The tower is scheduled for restoration that will allow it to open to the public.



Fund drive under way to restore Tower 3

To make a donation to restore Tower 3, go to www.savethetower.org or phone 227-2800 for more information. For more information about the two groups spearheading the effort go to the following: Fort Miles Historical Association at www.fortmiles.org and Delaware Seashore Preservation Foundation at www.dspf.net.

Ron MacArthur photos