

# LIGHTHOUSE

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let that light slowly extinguish, as more up-to-date technologies take the place of this old fashioned beacon for seamen.

"Without the light, it's just not the same..." he said. "We need to get a commitment from the Coast Guard that they will maintain that light."

Bailey said fishermen, as well as boats traveling to and from Tampa Bay and the Florida Keys, still look for its rays as a navigational tool.

"They see the light and go around Sanibel and Captiva and go on up the coast," he said.

The City of Sanibel, the Sanibel Historic Committee, and others, such as Karen Morris of the Florida Lighthouse Association, are loosely joined in efforts to keep it aglow, and maintained. Bailey said the tower needs a paint job every six years, also that its stairs need welding.

Morris, an avid champion of lighthouses around the world (and author of "Lighthouse Lovers 'Worldwide' Travel Guide") became involved with the Sanibel Lighthouse last summer, when she got word of its dark future. Since then, she has made efforts to unify the community and its leaders towards the goal of maintaining, and also renovating, the historic landmark. She hopes to see the keeper's quarters, where two Sanibel public works employees now live, transformed into something that is more in the public's interest: a museum, or a bed and breakfast.

"If the community cares about it enough, they'll keep it lit," she said. "If people don't support it now, that light is in danger of being put out. We're going to lose a piece of history if people don't write in and say we need it, we love it, we want to keep it."

And, Morris notes, "There's no shortage of money on Sanibel."

Gates Castle, public works director for the City of Sanibel, said the Coast Guard declared it an "excess property," which means it is something they no longer need. Although they may no longer need it, they still control it. But members of the Coast Guard in Fort Myers and St. Petersburg contacted last week said they don't use the lighthouse, and were not aware it existed; others were out of the office or didn't return calls before press time. Bailey said he's not sure who there knows about it, that he's lost touch with them.

"They change command like I change my underwear," he said.

Lieutenant Roy Brubaker at the Coast Guard's office of waterways management in Miami, said the Coast Guard is trying to turn over control of the lighthouse property to the City of Sanibel, but will continue to maintain the light itself, because it is still an aid to navigation for barges, tugs, fishing vessels and recreational vessels.

"I have not heard anything about the light being extinguished and I would have been the person to hear about it," he said. "Typically, being an historical aid, it's not going to be extinguished."

U.S. Coast Guard Lieutenant Jessica



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO EVAN WILLIMAMS

**Sanibel Islanders such as Sam Bailey, left, and Karen Morris are trying to save the 134-year-old working lighthouse on the island's southern shore. U.S. Coast Guard officials said they are trying to turn over control of the lighthouse property to Sanibel, but they will continue to maintain the light itself.**

Crandell in St. Petersburg mentioned the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000.

"That process says that if the Coast Guard no longer deems a lighthouse necessary, it turns it over to a historical society," she said.

In this case, that hasn't happened yet, but Castle said the federal Bureau of

Land Management wants to relinquish the property, turning it over to the city, which leases the lighthouse, the keeper's quarters and property around it from the Coast Guard on a yearly basis.

"What we've been trying to do as the city is get the property secured from the federal government," Castle said. "We've already been maintaining (the property) through the years through agreements with the Coast Guard. We've put a lot of money into the cottages, repairing them, and so on and so forth. So it makes logical sense that the federal government...would give us the land."

Repairs and renovations will be up to the city council, he said, once the city has full control of the property. But until then, a status quo will be in effect; and the light will shine on, until it doesn't.

"No one has submitted proposals to do anything with the property and until the federal government acts, no one can do anything with it, and at this time, the city doesn't have the budget to do anything other than what it has been doing, which is maintain the property," Sanibel City Manager Judie Zimomra said.

Bailey said someone, anyone, needs to step in and make a rock solid plan for the lighthouse's future.

"Someone's not going to support something if they're not sure if it's gonna exist or not," he said.

Lowe's Home Improvement, for example, might be more willing to chip in on a paint job. Or maybe the community would find ways to help; people like Willard Scott, host of NBC's Today show, and is a Sanibel homeowner. Scott once broadcast the show, usually seen from Times Square, from the Sanibel Lighthouse, at dawn. Bailey said he and his wife drove around town the evening before assembling a crowd to be there too, and wave at the cameras.

Once a plan solidifies, the support of the community will follow, Morris said. ■

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