

Backers say lighthouse proposal within reach

By **BRIAN SEALS**

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Backers of a plan to build a lighthouse on the west jetty of the Santa Cruz Harbor say they are close to making their dream a reality.

Last summer, Live Oak resident Bill Simpkins and friends formed the Harbor Light Committee to raise money to build the new lighthouse on the west jetty at the harbor. At \$170,000, they are short of the \$230,000 it will take to build the lighthouse.

Still, Simpkins is anxious to get started. "I want to get the thing built this summer," Simpkins said, perhaps optimistically.

For more than 30 years, the harbor has operated without a lighthouse and boaters have used a series of minimal structures to find the harbor.

Meanwhile, the well-known lighthouse on the Westside has in part come to symbolize this seaside city.

Simpkins wants the one at the harbor to be the same for Eastside neighborhoods, envisioning the pair as sort of bookends for the city's coastline.

"It's a landmark for the Live Oak and Seabright area," Simpkins said.

Indeed, supporters of the lighthouse say it would be a pleasant aesthetic change from the series of bare-essential poles with foghorns and lights the U.S. Coast Guard has used to warn and guide boaters during the past three decades.

A rusted, box-like structure was replaced in 1996 with a cylinder structure often referred to as the "water heater." In 1999, the structure — a modest pole with brightly colored rectangles on the top for navigation — was placed at the harbor entrance.

But there's more to the effort to build a lighthouse than creating a visually pleasing harbor. Backers say it will contribute to safer boating.

Jim Thoit, a boater and member of the Lighthouse Committee said that the light structure could be better.

"You get out a ways and it just blends in with everything," Thoit said.

Port Director Brian Foss agrees.

"There's a definite safety benefit," said Foss. "It will be much easier to find the harbor. If you were in a small boat, you would probably see it at four miles as opposed to two miles."

The plan itself still has a few miles to go before it becomes a reality. The project is wind-



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Bill Simpkins is spearheading the effort to replace the light tower at the small craft harbor with a more traditional lighthouse.

ing its way through the permit process with the city, the California Coastal Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Once built, it would be maintained and operated by the Santa Cruz Port Commission. The Commission donated \$30,000 toward the project last month and voted to budget money for maintenance of it once it is built.

There is also a time element. Supporters want to begin construction before October to beat the winter storm season. Otherwise, construction

could be delayed until spring.

While the timing is in question, backers say the lighthouse will be built.

"It is going to happen," Foss said.

Anyone interested in donating to the lighthouse project can send donations to Santa Cruz Port District, Lighthouse Fund, 135 Fifth Ave., Santa Cruz, CA 95062.

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