

# Lighting the Way

The Santa Cruz Harbor will soon shine bright with a proper lighthouse.

by Bruce Willey

*Lighthouses*

From touristy postcards to the emblem on Santa Cruz city maintenance trucks, the lighthouse overlooking Steamer Lane along West Cliff Drive serves as both symbolic icon and the maritime beacon of this coastal town. Now, the little brick lighthouse, a Santa Cruz institution, is about to get an impressive 37-foot sister.

Stationed on the jetty of the Santa Cruz Harbor, where the ocean meets a tangle of giant concrete jacks, construction is well underway for a brand new lighthouse that will guide boats to safe anchorage through the hazardous channels of the harbor mouth, as well as enhance the port's entry with one of the most enduring and beloved architectural seaside elements known to sailors and landlubbers alike. In the classic, cylindrical style, the lighthouse will provide both safe passage and aesthetic improvement to the harbor.

That's how Brian Foss, the port director and chief administrator of the Santa Cruz Harbor, sees it. He says that even in its unfinished state, boaters are praising the lighthouse, reporting that it is easier to find the harbor, even without the light that is yet to be placed on top. "Every boater will use it," Foss says, "especially the smaller boats that don't have a lot of navigation equipment. Plus, it's a wonderful aesthetic to the area. I think it will probably become the signature of the harbor."

Foss has seen a lot of changes to the harbor in his 28 years on the job, including the rise and fall of the hodge-podge of lights and foghorns erected by the U.S. Coast Guard, which over the years have ungracefully adorned the end of the jetty. When the harbor first opened in 1962, what Foss calls an "arachnid with lights and a horn" guided boaters. That structure eventually needed replacing and the "water heater," a tubular structure better suited for the inside of a house than a structure facing the onslaught of the sea, took its place. But then rust corroded its exterior and the interior ladder, making it impossible to service the light. In 1999, the Coast Guard built the uninspired, sterile post that now stands 30 feet from the new lighthouse.

"I can't think of another lighthouse that has been built recently," Foss says. "This isn't

a true lighthouse in that there isn't a keeper, but it's still authentic."

Indeed, this is no toy. The lighthouse must be able to withstand everything the "perfect" storm can throw at it. The beacon will be built to weather a 13-foot tide (a normal high tide is 7 feet) and a 27-foot wave with a log in it, Foss explains. That's why the base of the lighthouse has four-foot-thick concrete walls reinforced with one-inch, epoxy-coated Rebar. Also, 170 cubic yards of concrete is used in the construction, which uses a process similar to the construction techniques found in swimming pools, where the concrete is "shot" at 5,000 pounds per square

inch into the mold.

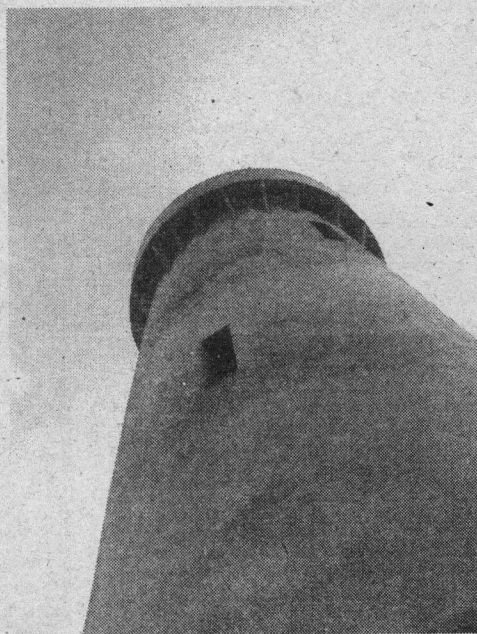
None of this comes cheap, however. The total cost runs about \$360,000. The harbor itself pitched in \$30,000, but most of the funding is coming from private contributors (for \$1,000 you can get a placard emblazoned with your name on the side of the structure). So far, Foss says \$200,000 has been raised, mostly from local donors, such as harbor neighbors Jack O'Neill, and The Crow's Nest. And the lighthouse's designer, structural engineer Mark Miller, donated his expertise to the project. But Foss says the inspiration came from noted local philanthropist

Bill Simpkins, who told Foss, "It looks bare out there and we need a lighthouse."

Simpkins was the "get things done" guy behind the project. According to Foss, Simpkins has been the major player in making the lighthouse a reality. "It's his vision and his unstoppable," says Foss.

Though he won't attach his moniker to the project like he did with the Simpkins Swim Center in Live Oak — that distinction goes to another local philanthropist, Charles Walton, who has ties to the maritime community and has donated scads of money to the project — Simpkins is the guiding light behind the concrete beacon.

As Foss walks out to lighthouse along a sandy road tracked with trucks and heavy machinery, you can see a fresh layer of gray concrete has just been laid near the top where the light and horn will soon be. His blue tie whips around in the wind, and when asked if he would be willing to stand inside the structure if that 27-foot wave ever broke over the lighthouse, Foss laughs, "You know, I probably would. If there wasn't a log in the wave."



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**Phallic things to come:** Santa Cruz Harbor erects a new lighthouse.