

Beginning to see the light

Walton Lighthouse dedication highlights 'tribute to humanity'

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SANTA CRUZ — A new lighthouse at Santa Cruz harbor doesn't just highlight the harbor for boaters, community leaders said at a ceremony Sunday — it shows the good that can happen when people work together.

Hundreds of people crowded the wind-swept west jetty of the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor as the \$360,000 Santa Cruz Harbor Light Walton Lighthouse was officially dedicated.

It is the fourth structure to mark the harbor entrance and, at 42 feet, stands far above the others in terms of aesthetics and safety, officials say.

Santa Cruz resident Bill Simpkins started the lighthouse quest in 1999, and he and others raised about \$400,000 for the project — more than required for construction. It sailed through several governmental approvals before construction wrapped up in November.

"Something inspired him to inspire us," Port Director Brian Foss told the crowd Sunday. "I think he lobbied everyone in Santa Cruz.

"I've come to realize that everybody loves lighthouses, they are like a great friend — steady through all kinds of weather, and always there to guide and orient."

The district plans to offer docent-led tours of the lighthouse, which has more than 40 stairs and a lookout area near the top, Foss said.

Los Gatos resident Charles Walton, who owns an electronics business and has a sailboat at the harbor, contributed nearly \$100,000 and was recognized at the dedication.

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Charles Walton of Los Gatos donated almost \$100,000 to the new lighthouse. The lighthouse was named in his honor at Sunday's dedication ceremony.





Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The harbor's west jetty is packed with people for Sunday's lighthouse dedication.

Lighthouse

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"It feels good," Walton said. "It's a tribute to humanity."

Bill Lee of Santa Cruz, a well-known sailor and former boat builder, said the lighthouse would especially benefit smaller boats, such as kayaks, that don't have onboard navigational devices.

"It's a great project," Lee said. "They quit building lighthouses that look like this at the turn of the century."

The U.S. Coast Guard and the Santa Cruz Port District will maintain what Santa Cruz Mayor Christopher Krohn Sunday called "a light to usher them home."

The county and city contributed to the project but did not have jurisdiction over the building approval process, Foss said.

The engineer, Mark Mesiti-Miller of Santa Cruz, captured a top award for the project from the Structural Engineers Association of Northern California.

It was a challenge building something to withstand 350,000 pounds of wave energy on a pile of rocks, he said.

"That would be like throwing a dozen houses at it at once. The forces are huge," he said. "And they're expensive, but this is a grand slam. This is whole reason behind being an engineer."

A memorial plaque on the lighthouse contains a long list of donors, including 15 people and organizations that donated \$10,000 or more, including the port district and the county.

The building was constructed by Devcon Construction of Santa Cruz, which performed the work at cost, as did Mesiti-Miller.

Simpkins, the organizer, said the best part was the stories people told him about their family member or friend in whose name they wished to donate.

For Margaret Margo, 62, of Santa Cruz, it was her husband, Sal J. Margo Sr., who ran Pleasure Point Charters out of the harbor for years and died last June.

"This is something he would have really, really appreciated," Margo said. "My feeling was, if I did anything in his memory, other than keep the faith that I'll see him again one day, it should be bringing the grandchildren out here to keep his memory alive."

For more information, call the Port District at 475-6161, or visit scharbor.org.



Getting up and down the spiral staircase proved to be a tight squeeze for lighthouse visitors Sunday.

scharbor.org.

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