

# BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL LIGHTHOUSE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

## DeTour Reef Light Preservation Society (DRLPS)

presented by

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at

Keep the Lights On! Strategies for Saving Michigan's Lighthouses  
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Thank you Michael, it is a pleasure to be here today representing the De'Tour Reef Light Preservation Society team at this first historic lighthouse workshop. Part of our team is here today - Carol Melvin our Finance Committee Chairperson, my husband Chuck Feltner our Chief Historian, and Dick Moehl our founder and one of our Directors. Other members are my brother Larry Baron, the video man, Marilyn Fischer, President of the Gulliver Historical Society, Sandy Planisek Director of the GLLM, John Wagner and John Andree.

We come here today from the front lines of the creating and operating of a successful lighthouse preservation society. We learned a lot, and I would like to share with you today what we did to earn the honor of being the new caretaker of one of America's unique resources -- the De'Tour Reef Lighthouse.

The AGENDA includes:

- 1) Historical Background
- 2) The Situation Today
- 3) DRLPS Purpose
- 4) Accomplishments
- 5) Goals
- 6) The Challenge for the Future
- 7) Closing Remarks
- 1) HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Let me give you a brief historical background. The original Lighthouse that is no longer in existence, was the De'Tour Point Light established onshore in 1847 and rebuilt in 1861. This Light was replaced

by the DeTour Reef Light in 1931. It is located at the entrance to the St. Mary's River in Northern Lake Huron in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, one mile offshore from the original lighthouse. It is of Art-deco architecture with a white exterior and a red dome, is framed in steel and sits on a 60-foot square concrete platform crib in 24 feet of water. The three-and-a-half order Fresnel lens is now on display at the DeTour Passage Historical Museum. The Light was automated in 1974. The focal plane is 74 feet above the water and can be seen from 17 miles.

2) THE SITUATION TODAY

I want to describe the situation today. As is with most of the lights in the nation, due to modern satellite navigational aids, and little funds for maintenance of the building, the DeTour Reef Light was declared excess property by the Coast Guard in 1997. Bob Jones, our President, Dick Moehl, and the Sault Ste Marie Coast Guard visited the lighthouse in August of 1997 and found the building to be structurally sound but in need of thorough maintenance and refurbishing. Dick then rallied local troops at DeTour Village and Drummond Island, and with his characteristic enthusiasm and a wealth of information, the DeTour Reef Light Preservation Society was officially formed on January 4, 1998.

3) DRLPS PURPOSE

Next, let me read for you the official purpose of the DRLPS. "The purpose of the Society is to establish, support and promote efforts in the preservation and restoration of the DeTour Reef Light; to achieve the safe keeping of the building, artifacts and records; to educate and inform the public on its history; and to raise awareness about the importance of volunteers in maintaining and protecting the DeTour Reef Light for all present and future generations."

4) ACCOMPLISHMENTS

I now want to describe what we have accomplished in the last ten months.

A) Formation, Organizational Structure and Administration

We developed a dedicated team of volunteers willing to work long hours to be the Directors, Officers and Committee Chairpersons of the society. We then worked to complete reams of paperwork required to become a nonprofit tax-exempt 501C3 organization. The first step was to write a set of Bylaws which are rules governing the internal affairs of the organization. I

have samples of all of our paperwork in a binder here which you can take a look at - we will share copies of this material. Then we did the Articles of Incorporation for the State of Michigan which stated our intended purpose. We then obtained an EIN - an Employer Identification Number from the IRS required for all corporations. Last, but not least, we submitted our application for nonprofit, tax-exempt status from the IRS -- better known as getting approval as a 501C3 organization. We included copies of our Bylaws, Articles of Incorporation, and our promotional material as attachments. We filed with the IRS on January 17 and received a response giving a file number and contact person on January 30. We periodically followed up on the status. On April 1 we received our determination letter granting us our 501C3 status. The IRS usually requires 90 days to review the application.

The government agencies want to be assured that you are a well-organized, serious, viable organization. Develop as much promotional material as possible and send copies to them.

A very important part of the society is to define the programs you want to fund, and then develop a budget for each program and do income/expense reports on a regular basis. Most of our expenses for the first ten months were for promotion and membership development.

We also obtained a Sales Tax License, Raffle License, Solicitation of Donations License, and a Nonprofit Mail Permit.

Also, monthly board meetings are held and detailed minutes taken and distributed.

A very helpful publication for nonprofit groups is the Michigan Nonprofit Management Manual from the Accounting Aid Society in Detroit.

## B) Publicity and Advertising

Relative to our publicity and advertising --- our identity was established with a logo, letterhead, business cards, and membership cards. We wrote a newsrelease stating who we are and asking for support and sent it along with a photo of the lighthouse to newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations, local businesses, nationwide maritime organizations, government agencies, and regional politicians. We put notices up in the local communities. We placed ads in local papers. We attended local and state events with our literature and memorabilia. Slide presentations were given to local groups. And we asked for resolutions from local communities in support of our project.

A letter was sent (with all of our promotional material) to the Coast Guard, the General Services Administration, and the Department of Environmental Quality stating our interest in acquiring a lease of the lighthouse. It is important to periodically check with them on status.

As you know, the National Trust for Historic Preservation put all of Michigan's historic lighthouses on its 1998 list of America's Most Endangered Places -- exemplified by the DeTour Reef Light - we are very proud to be the example.

C) Membership Development

To garner members, sign up sheets and membership brochures were placed in all local businesses. Brochures were sent to targeted mailing lists. We set up several membership categories. Not only do we have Individual for \$15, Family for \$25, Patron for \$50 - as normal low-cost memberships, we also offer Keeper for \$100, Lifetime for \$500, and Grand Keeper for \$1,000 for those who wish to make a larger contribution. We offered special charter-year incentives for each category as described in our brochure. In a short 10 months, we now have 356 members coast-to-coast and have generated approximately \$23,000 in dues. Our first quarterly newsletter *Passages* was sent to members with information, progress and plans. Our membership list is on a computer database with 12 fields of information. We plan to keep our on-line members regularly informed via e-mail.

D) Activities and Fund-Raising Events

Our first fund-raiser was a benefit dinner in April, then a boat cruise to the lighthouse in June, and an Auction with dinner in August. Along with a good time, our three fund-raisers generated approximately \$6,000. These events also contributed greatly to the building of our membership. Society memorabilia was developed, sold at events, from our office at the Fogcutter Restaurant in DeTour, and by mail order.

Since we did not own the lighthouse, grant money opportunity was scarce. We are now prepared to pursue that arena.

A Wish List was developed for items needed to restore the lighthouse, including equipment and furniture, along with items needed to run an office. Many people and businesses have made donations.

Local school children - our future keepers of the light - have joined in by collecting pop cans and placing their drawings of the lighthouse in the local businesses.

E) Historical Research

We did historical research. Architectural drawings of the lighthouse were acquired from the Coast Guard in Sault Ste. Marie. Old photos and information regarding the lighthouse were obtained from local citizens, members, the National Archives, the Coast Guard in Washington and Cleveland, and other maritime societies.

Photos were taken of the lighthouse – both inside and out – and used for promotion.

Additionally, the following material was obtained which have been very helpful: Inventory of Historic Light Stations, and the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) Inventory of Light Station. We are in the process of preparing a booklet on the history of the DeTour Reef Light.

F) Restoration

Now on to the restoration. The Coast Guard has recently agreed to give the Society a long-term lease of the lighthouse which is currently being reviewed by their legal system. Next spring they plan to repair the interior walls, encapsulate the plaster which contains asbestos, remove damaged lead paint, seal and paint all interior surfaces. Once they are finished, the Society will present them with our Asbestos Management Plan and then our restoration volunteers will do any interior work required and begin the exterior restoration.

Application for lease of the bottomlands was made to the State's Department of Environmental Quality, Land and Water Management Division. It is in process and the feedback we have is that the bottomlands lease will be granted to the Society.

Our plan is to completely restore the lighthouse cosmetically and with original period furnishings and equipment, along with providing docking and boarding accessibility.

The original foghorn from the lighthouse was recently given to us by the Great Lakes Historical Society in Ohio. Jeff Laser of Ohio (who discovered it at the society's storage area), has completely restored it to full tooting order. He has put his heart and soul into this effort at his cost. He has made audio recordings of it in operation, taken photos and a video. He will return the foghorn (all 475 pounds of her) to DeTour in the near future and it will eventually be placed back on the lighthouse.

A solid oak dining room table and six chairs were beautifully hand-crafted and donated to the Society and will be moved to the lighthouse as part of the furnish-to-original-appearance restoration project.

We acquired an extremely helpful manual which is a must for all preservation groups - the Historic Lighthouses Preservation Handbook. Another good source of information is the National Trust for Historic Preservation Information Series Booklets.

#### 5) GOALS

Now I want to tell you about our near-term goals.

Our current goal is to get membership renewals of our regular members and donations from those who signed up as lifetime members. Additionally we are working on incorporating matching funds from employers. We plan to actively pursue the Grants and Financial Assistance programs available to fund our future lighthouse projects, which include restoration and maintenance both cosmetically and functionally to make the DeTour Reef Light the best offshore lighthouse museum in the Nation. We want to do a scale model of the lighthouse to take to educational presentations and alternate the display of it at the DeTour Museum and the Drummond Island Museum. Additionally, we want to develop an interpretive traveling educational display of the lighthouse and the maritime history of the area.

Other important goals include, strategic planning and budgeting, volunteer management and membership development.

#### 6) CHALLENGE FOR THE FUTURE

Our challenge for the future is two-fold. First, that our Society will continue to persevere and maintain the momentum that it has created and stay the course as a successful society.

Our second challenge for the future is to use what we've learned to help others. I would hope for all of the societies to work together as a team sharing information to be sure that each unique lighthouse has their own special keepers.

7) CLOSING REMARKS

In closing, I'd like to ad -- As a byproduct of the local people's efforts to save the DeTour Reef Light, both communities across the St. Mary's River from each other - DeTour Village and Drummond Island - have been brought together in a spirit of cooperation as a larger integrated community to save the lighthouse.

It's been a fun journey - a great learning experience for me personally and a wonderful opportunity to meet some terrific people dedicated to preserving our history.

I would be happy to answer any questions and share any of our material on this subject to help you with your journey to establishing a successful lighthouse preservation society.

As George Putnam, the first Commissioner of Lighthouses at the turn of the century, once said -- "the building and the keeping of the lights is a picturesque and humanitarian work of the nation." I believe that the preservation of these historic lighthouses is a humanitarian duty of the nation.

We welcome your support of the DeTour Reef Light Preservation Society. Please join today to help us preserve this monument to our maritime heritage -- and remember our motto -- "we'll keep the light on for you!" Thank you.

