



Fall 2004

# *Life Lines*

*The Quarterly Newsletter of the  
U.S. Life-Saving Service Heritage Association*

## **Weathering Frances**

### **Gilbert's Bar House of Refuge Outlasts Florida Hurricane**

The Historical Society of Martin County announced on September 14 that the Elliott Museum and the House of Refuge Museum, both located on Hutchinson Island in Stuart, survived Hurricane Frances with only minimal damage. Barring any unforeseen circumstances both museums were scheduled to reopen to the public Monday, September 20 at 10:00 a.m.

"Considering their proximity to the ocean and the direct hit they took from Frances we are thrilled with the condition of the museums," said Renee Booth, Director of Visitor Services for the Historical Society. "We kept in touch with the authorities and the media representatives on the island as long as we could through the storm and prayed for the best. Staff and volunteers of the Historical Society worked diligently to prepare in advance of the storm, with the protection of the archives and historical artifacts being the priority."

The Elliott Museum, built in 1961, once served as a hurricane shelter on the island and is constructed of solid concrete, but the age of the 26,000 sq. ft. structure was a concern. Archives were moved off-site, mannequins dressed in vintage apparel were covered with plastic and other valuable artifacts were moved into bunker areas of the building. "The Historical Society of Martin County has an explicit disaster plan which we began to implement well before the onset of hurricane Frances, said Robin Hicks-Connors, President/CEO of the Society. "A main concern of ours was the House of Refuge, but once again it prevailed. There was reason it was built where

it was in 1875 and a reason it still stands strong today."

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the House of Refuge at Gilbert's Bar was commissioned by the U.S. Treasury Department in 1875, and was one of ten houses built identically along the east coast of Florida as a safe haven for shipwreck victims along our rocky coastline. It is the only remaining of the ten built in Florida and the only remaining of its kind in the country. It is the oldest building in Martin County. The property is now owned by the county and operated by the Historical Society as a museum.

At the House of Refuge Museum copies of shipwreck reports may be viewed along with a pictorial history of its various incarnations. Both museums are open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. and Sunday from 1:00 – 4 p.m.

For more information about the Historical Society of Martin County, the Elliott Museum or the House of Refuge Museum, please call 772-225-1961.

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## Heritage Association

### ***Life Lines***

#### ***Issue #24***

Newsletter of the  
United States Life-Saving Service  
Heritage Association  
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## **USLSSHA Headed to 7th Maritime Heritage Conference October 27-30, 2004, Norfolk, VA**

USLSSHA is preparing to “wave the flag” at the Seventh Maritime Heritage Conference in Norfolk, Virginia.

The organization, a Silver Level Sponsor of the conference, will present several lectures at the conference, including an introduction by Past President Maurice Gibbs; “Greater Love Hath No Man: Joshua James and the New England Experience,” John Galluzzo; “Storm Warriors on the Inland Seas: The USLSS on the Great Lakes,” President Frederick Stonehouse; “Heroes of the Mid-Atlantic and Outer Banks,” Linda Molloy, Operations Director for the Chicamacomico Historical Society; “Shipwrecks and Great Heroes of the Northwest,” David Pinyerd, President of Historic Preservation Northwest; and “They Had to Go Out,” Lory Newmyer, director of the Hull Lifesaving Museum.

## **Annual Meeting Recap: All You’d Expect from the Coast of Maine**

Perhaps it was just the end of summer and the encroaching feeling of autumn, but there was definitely a sense of change in the air as the U.S. Life-Saving Service Heritage Association came together in Mid-Coast Maine for the 2004 Annual Conference and Meeting.

The weather held out for nearly the entire end-of-the-week stretch, with nothing more than a chilly breeze at Owl’s Head Lighthouse calling for windbreakers and light sweaters to be donned. Even so, the forty-five or so adventurers gladly offered that action in trade for the spectacular views from the pine tree tops at that particular sight.

Major changes took place on the Board of Directors, as President Maurice Gibbs stepped down after 7 years as the association’s front man, opening the door for Vice President Fred Stonehouse to take the organizational reins. Concurrently, Treasurer Drew Loizeaux gracefully bowed out of his position, yet neither has strayed too far afield: Gibbs has become the new Treasurer and Loizeaux will remain on the Board of Directors. Gary Studer, owner of the Oak Island (NC) Life-Saving Station, ascended to the Vice President’s position.

John Galluzzo, editor of *Wreck & Rescue* and *Life Lines*, stepped down from his place on the board to become the organization’s first executive director. Dog MacDonald, an ex-Coast Guardsman and a volunteer at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan, took Galluzzo’s place on the board. Penny Watson, an architect with the New Jersey firm of Watson and Henry, and Dr. Curtis Prout, President of the Humane Society of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, accepted new terms as directors.

Members headquartered at the Maine Maritime Museum, a stone’s throw from Sumner Kimball’s alma mater, Bowdoin College (some explorers spent the Sunday after the conference seeking Kimball’s burial site), and made trips to Bristol, Portland, Biddeford, Rockland and more. Watch for a full recap of the meeting’s events in the November issue of *Wreck & Rescue Journal*.



*An artist's rendering of a proposed new town-owned marina on the Scituate waterfront shows both a Humane Society boathouse, on the left, and an Irish mossing shanty being utilized, and, most importantly, saved. (Drawing by Rampantly Creative, LLC.)*

## **Preservation Update: Humane Society boathouse saved in Scituate, Massachusetts**

Although neither its name or history ever came up in any of the newspaper articles that led up to its purchase by the Town of Scituate at the special September 27 Town Meeting, a rare Massachusetts Humane Society boathouse has been saved from possible demolition. Although firm plans never arose to take the building down, owners of the land on which it sits, locally referred to as “Young’s Boat Yard,” ignored several attempts by the Scituate Historical Society to purchase and move the historic structure to its maritime museum a mile down the road. Such a move, though, is no longer necessary.

Scituate voters approved overwhelmingly to spend the \$4.2 million dollars to buy the land on Scituate Harbor, envisioning future uses to include the operation of a town-owned marina; relocation of the town’s youth sailing programs, to be run from the boathouse; a canoe and kayak launch; and the possible creation of a Scituate Harborwalk, linking parcels of public land rimming Scituate Harbor.

Scituate is already home to the Scituate Maritime & Irish Mossing Museum, with exhibits on the history of the Life-Saving Service and the Humane Society of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; Scituate Lighthouse; an operational Coast Guard station-small; and the Bibb#2 North Scituate Life-Saving Station, restored as a private residence.

## **New Life for Menemsha Coast Guard Station Martha’s Vineyard Station restored to full active status**

The people of Chilmark, Massachusetts, on the island of Martha’s Vineyard, watched with growing trepidation as their local Coast Guard station experienced staffing cuts in 1996, as did many communities around the United States during the Coast Guard’s “rightsizing” experiment. What was once a thriving station with 30 personnel shrunk first to 20, and then fewer billets. The station became so vacant that the Chilmark police moved in to use a portion of the building, a 1930s Roosevelt-type lifeboat station. In December of 2003, though, the police were instructed by the town to move out, signaling the return to full status for the Coast Guard station.

That return came on September 27, as Congressman William Delahunt (D-Quincy, MA) joined Coast Guard officials in a public ceremony to commemorate the change. Work crews had been working since the spring to make upgrades to the interior of the building for increased efficiency at the station, which is responsible for an area of operation that includes not only the waters around Martha’s Vineyard but the New Bedford harborfront as well.

The station’s crew, working 95-100 hours each during the past few years, has nonetheless handled its heavy workload with some excellence, earning the Sumner Kimball readiness award, the only station-small ever to do so.

# Preservation Update:

## A Plea for Help for Tawas Station

by Jeff Shook, USLSSHA member  
and President of the  
Michigan Lighthouse Conservancy

An important part of our nation's maritime history may be lost without immediate help. The former U.S. Coast Guard Station or old U.S. Life Saving Station is being threatened by development and needs to be saved immediately or it will be torn down. This information is presented in hopes of raising enough interest to save something that cannot be replaced and the funds necessary to do it.

Congress created the U.S. Life Saving Service in 1871 which is the forerunner to today's U.S. Coast Guard. Recognizing Michigan's treacherous coastline in 1875 a station was built at what was known as Ottawa Point on Lake Huron or today is known as Tawas Point. The station contains a boat-house, garage, shed and the station house. Just down the shoreline on the same point of land that extends out into the lake, another structure was built to aid the mariner in navigating the coast, which is the Tawas Point lighthouse.

The station had an addition put on in 1935. Today, the original 1875 Type station still exists under those modifications and is in dire trouble of being lost forever if something isn't done to save the building from being destroyed if they are not relocated or dismantled. The station is nearing the end of its days because of lakefront development like so many other stations, which have been torn down. Michigan alone has lost most of these old stations and very few are left to tell this part of history.

Our story begins a long time ago. The land that the Tawas Life Saving Station was built on was loaned to the government as long as they used it for life saving purposes. The U.S. Coast Guard expanded over the years and eventually a new

modern station was built on the opposite side of the point. A unique problem with the Tawas station was the fate of the station based on the landowner loan. The Coast Guard, once they stopped using the old station gave the land back to the relatives of the man who made the agreement with them back in the 1800's as required. The buildings received no historical preservation covenant on them. The relatives who received the station back decided to sell the property.

The Michigan Lighthouse Conservancy (MLC), a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization whose goal is to help save threatened lighthouses and life saving stations in Michigan tried to get the entire property donated for preservation which did not occur. The fear existed that the buildings, if purchased, could be torn down to make way for a new lakefront development. MLC has persuaded the new owner, who is a land developer, to work



with us on trying to preserve the station by not tearing the buildings down and donating them to us if we can move them from the property.

The station is one of only sixteen such structures built around the United States under architect Francis W. Chandler's design, and only one of five still standing today. Very few original Life Saving Service stations remain in Michigan today and it is vitally important for MLC to help save this building. We have a limited timeline to get the buildings moved off the current property or dismantled for re-assembly in a yet to be

determined location, which is the only way to save them from being destroyed by development.

We are looking at many options to save these buildings; the bottom line is they need to be moved or dismantled which costs a lot of money. At the very least, our goal is to save the original 1875 station house and move it to a safe location for restoration and to become a possible museum or used for other public education about our maritime heritage. Once restored it will become a valuable national treasure and hopefully become a National Historic Landmark. If other parts of the station can be saved then those are considered bonuses.

All of these options require funds, land donations or purchases. **THIS IS A CALL FOR HELP!** We desperately need to raise money to save these buildings. The bottom line price tag to move the building, purchase a lot or dismantle the building and move it somewhere else is approximately \$60,000. More will be needed for restoration.

Another option we are discussing right now is to leave the station in place and purchase it from the developer for what he paid and that figure is \$500,000. Leaving the station in its original location would be the most historically accurate thing to do. We are hopeful someone may come forward to do this such as a large corporate sponsor or a few donors with the entire amount needed. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity because once the buildings are lost, they are lost forever. Other stations on Lake Huron that have been lost are the original Port Huron; Harbor Beach; Sturgeon Point; Thunder Bay Island and Middle Island stations. There is only one Life Saving Service museum on Lake Huron located in Huron City which is the former Pointe Aux Barques station. It was moved from its original location to be saved. We hope to make this the second one.

We have until late this fall and early winter to make something happen, which is not much time. We want to make sure future generations are able to learn about this part of our maritime heritage and will look back 100 years from now and say that our ancestors had the thoughtfulness to save this part of our history. We feel that with this station being only one of five still standing in the nation of this type that it is worth saving and restoring.

Donations to the Michigan Lighthouse Conservancy are tax deductible, we are an approved 501(c)3 organization. You may send donations to us at P.O. Box 973, Fenton, MI. 48430. Please mark them as Tawas Fund. You may call us for any questions at 810-750-9236. Our web site address is <http://www.michiganlights.com>. You can view the Tawas Emergency section to read about current news or on the Life Saving Service section of the web site to learn more about the service. Please help us now.

## **Preservation Update: Bad News for Kill Devil Hills, NC**

More than 400 people signed a petition in support of halting the destruction of the Baum-St.Clair house on Virginia Dare Trail, Kill Devil Hills, on the Outer Banks of North Carolina, but it may not be enough to save the building. Built in 1933, it was the last Coast Guard-built structure constructed on the Outer Banks.

On August 18, the Kill Devil Hills Board of Commissioners took no action on a proposal to institute a moratorium on the demolition of structures more than fifty years old in town, what many saw as a last-ditch effort to save the building.

In a letter to the Board of Commissioners, attorney Hood Ellis, as reported in the *Outer Banks Sentinel*, stated "If the Town wants the property then let them buy it or condemn it...If the Town wants to protect the house and station now located on the property then the Town should negotiate in good faith with the co-executors to acquire and move the house and station, not seek moratoriums and the like to 'take' the property without just compensation."

He added that he believed his clients "would be more than happy to avoid [the demolition] expense if the Town wants to remove the house and station and relocate it elsewhere."

Although it may have been a move that came just a little too late, the Board of Commissioners appointed a Historic Landmark Commission that same night, a five-person panel charged with creating an inventory of historic properties in town.



*Director John Stires and incoming President Fred Stonehouse sought out the final resting place of General Superintendent of the U.S. Life-Saving Service Sumner Increase Kimball while in Maine for the 2004 Annual Conference and Meeting. (Photo courtesy of Fred Stonehouse)*

## **Coast Guardsman Earns Bronze Star**

**Petty Officer Joseph T. Ruggiero risked life to protect others in suicide attack**

In the last issue of *Life Lines* we reported that BM3 Joseph Ruggiero of Revere, Massachusetts, had earned a Purple Heart for wounds received in action in the Middle East, the first Coast Guardsman so recognized since the Vietnam War. Today, Ruggiero also wears a Bronze Star with V, for valor.

According to the citation accompanying the award, "He selflessly gave priority to his shipmates and assisted the most severely wounded...Petty Officer Ruggiero's total effectiveness and forceful leadership and loyal devotion to duty reflected great credit on him and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard."

After a dhow exploded near the boat on which he was traveling, eventually killing three of his comrades, Ruggiero swam to the other wounded sailors - he received wounds to the arm and face - and helped them inflate their lifejackets.

## **Second Coast Guard Vietnam Monument to be Dedicated at the U. S. Coast Guard Academy**

**New London, CT, October 23, 2004 at 9:00am.**

**Note from Robert MacLeod, Trustee, CGCVA, Project Officer, Vietnam Monument**

Our activities take place at 9:00 a.m. with military music, bagpipers, and a great speaker, Capt. Alex Larzelere, USCG Academy Class of 1958. He is the author of *The Coast Guard at War* and the 1980 Cuban Boatlift, among several of his publications, and also was the skipper on the 82-foot patrol boats *Point Comfort* and *Point Banks*.

The day at the Coast Guard Academy is to be filled with activities for Homecoming, Class of 1964, and we, the Coast Guard Combat Veterans Association, hope to be a part of several, including the Happy Hour after the football game and the dinner the same evening. Please refer to the Academy website for more information.

The American Legion of New London will also host a small reception on Friday evening.

So pass the word to our fellow Coasties, lets make this a great dedication to those men from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy who served with distinction.

Find out more about the Coast Guard Combat Veterans Association on their website: <http://www.coastguardcombatvets.com/index.asp>.



## **Ex - Coast Guard Station Gives Up Clues as to its Former Life**

### **Gloucester City, on the Delaware River holds tales of misery**

Not all Coast Guard stations started out as houses of refuge for shipwrecked mariners. While the station at Gloucester City, New Jersey, south of Camden on the Delaware River, was built as a stopping place for maritime travelers, search and rescue was not the original intent of the staff who worked within its walls.

Instead, the building that would someday become a U.S. Coast Guard station (local historians are unsure as to when that happened) originally served as an immigration detention center, a place where Europeans either without proper identification or with communicable diseases were held before either continuing their journey towards American citizenship or deportation back to their homelands.

The building remained a detention center through the beginning of World War II, after most of the major waves of European immigration to the United States had slowed down. It gained even more of a jailhouse reputation during the war, as German prisoners of war populated its holding cells. After the war the federal government turned the station over to the Coast Guard, which occupied it for approximately 40 years, leaving in 1988.

At one point, around eight years ago, the local government was prepared to bulldoze the old building in the name of progress, but a final reexamination of the building changed their minds. Local businessman Leo Holt, of Holt Oversight and Logistical Technologies, spent \$3 million in renovating the building, turning it into his company's corporate offices. And although there are lingering questions about how far the restoration was supposed to go, and fingers being pointed accusedly all around, the fact is that the building and its history was saved.

Local historians have very little in the way of gathered Coast Guard history on the site, even though the service used the building for four decades.

## **Loaded for Sleeping Bear**

### **2005 Annual Conference and Meeting will be one to remember**

#### **September 7-11, 2005, Leland, Michigan**

Some of us have been there before, but that won't stop us from going back to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore for a second time.

Directors Kim Mann and Bill Herd have spent a year already in organizing the 2005 Annual Conference and Meeting and have come up with a tentative schedule that is sure to entice first-time conference-goers out to the Lakes.

Herewith some highlights:

\*Preconference technical sessions on Wednesday, September 7, on topics potentially ranging from "Working with City Hall" to "Adaptive Reuse of Historic Structures";

\*Tours of Point Betsie, Elberta, North Manitou and South Manitou Lifesaving Stations, Frankfort Coast Guard Station and the Traverse City Coast Guard Air Station;

\*Lyle Gun and Coast Guard rescue Demonstrations;

\*Interaction with local historical societies, a presentation to the City of Elberta for the restoration of the Elberta Lifesaving Station, and more.

Although Kim and Bill have things well in hand, they need our help in selecting the preconference technical sessions. Please choose from the following, and send your choice to Kim at [kimberly\\_mann@nps.gov](mailto:kimberly_mann@nps.gov):

Working with City Hall  
Dealing with Consultants and Contractors  
Fund Raising  
Preservation Law  
National Register Nominations  
Building Maintenance and Repair  
Hazardous Materials  
Adaptive Reuse  
Historic Equipment Care  
Tax Incentives  
Research Techniques, or Other



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## Homemade Quilt Up for USLSSHA Raffle

You had to see it to believe it, but there it was in full color, the now-famous quilt to be raffled off on behalf of the USLSSHA at the 2005 Annual Conference and Meeting at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan.

After making its way from western Tennessee and through the 2004 Annual Conference in Mid-Coast Maine, the quilt has made its move on up to Michigan.

Our thanks go out to the Greene family of Cottage Grove, Tennessee, USLSSHA members and donors of the beautiful homemade quilt depicting scenes from USLSS history. No matter what price it brings in, the quilt will be a bargain for the raffle winner, when measured against the high number of hours of work put into it.

Raffle tickets sold at the annual meeting for \$5 apiece and 5 for \$20. For more information, contact Kim Mann at [kimberly\\_mann@nps.gov](mailto:kimberly_mann@nps.gov).

