

# Lighthouse museum offers unique getaway

BY MELANIE BOLTHOUSE

Autumn Guide editor

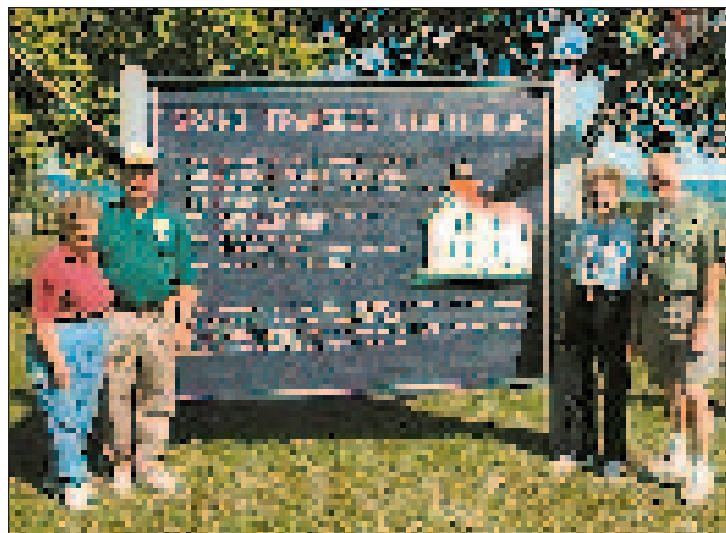
Since the Grand Traverse Lighthouse was built in 1852, more than 50 people have watched over the light that guides ships around the Leelanau Peninsula.

Beginning this year, the lighthouse museum is giving the public a chance to add more names to the roster through its volunteer lighthouse keepers program.

From April to December, people have the opportunity to live at the lighthouse for one to two weeks and aid in the upkeep and daily operations of the museum.

"They are the face of our organization," said Stefanie Staley, executive director of the Grand Traverse Lighthouse Museum. "They are the ones that intermix with the visitors that come through and they do everything."

The program was created after the lighthouse's caretaker retired after 15 years. Staley received requests from people who wanted to fill the empty position, but after observing a volunteer



Record-Eagle/Melanie Bolthouse

**Roberta and Roland DePeal, left, finished their duties at the lighthouse as Phyllis and Jack Relyea moved in.**

keeper program at Big Sable Lighthouse, the organization decided to create the opportunity for several people to act as keepers.

Participants in the program are chosen through an application process and must go through an orientation session before their visit, Staley said. While manning the lighthouse, up to four volunteers stay in the northern apartment in the museum and are put to

work during the day.

"They do a variety of different things depending on the time of year that they're here," Staley said.

The keepers in the spring help Staley get the museum ready to open, which includes chores such as cleaning and building exhibits. For participants who come during the summer through Labor Day, the main task is to greet visitors and provide them with information. Volunteers after Labor Day help ready the grounds for winter closure.

While the volunteer program's handbook specifically states the experience is not meant to be a vacation, participants may disagree.

"If you've been to all of the tourist attractions, if you've been to Disneyland, if you've been out West and seen all the attractions out there, and you want to do something different, this is the thing to do," said Rolland DePeal, who served as a volunteer keeper with his wife Roberta.

The DePeals, from Owosso, traveled to the lighthouse to participate in the program after seeing an ad for it in

their local paper.

"We just thought it would be a different type of way to spend our vacation time," DePeal said. "It's been unique. It's been fun."

During their stay, Roberta DePeal spent her time greeting guests at the entrance to the museum, while Rolland did regular maintenance around the grounds and guided people through the tower on busy days.

The couple agreed the best part of the experience was meeting and talking to the visitors.

"Most of them say thank you when they leave," Roberta said. "They tell us how nice (the museum) is."

The DePeals also enjoyed the nightly sunsets over the lake and the wildlife on the grounds.

"One morning we had a little fawn and doe come out and roam around the yard," Roberta said. "There's been swans that come down here almost every morning, if it's not too rough."

At the end of their two weeks at the lighthouse, the DePeals' final job was to give on-the-job training to their replacements, Phyllis and Jack Relyea of Rochester Hills.

The Relyeas decided to participate in the program after seeing the ad on the

Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Web site.

"I've been interested in lighthouses here in Michigan, and we've been to Maine, Nova Scotia and Europe and the Oregon Coast. Wherever there's a lighthouse, we're there," Phyllis said. "So this was a real unique opportunity on our back door."

While Phyllis was the main motivation for the couple's stay at the Grand Traverse Lighthouse, Jack tagged along for the experience.

"There's a mystique about lighthouses and the people who lived in these lighthouses, 100 years ago, 150 years ago, and the experience and troubles they went through — the isolation and survival," he said. "You get an opportunity to think about, how did these people really live? What made them get into this kind of business?"

As the DePeals and Relyeas traded places, the seasoned couple had advice for the newcomers.

"Just enjoy it," Rolland DePeal said. "Take some time if you can to sit and watch the sunset."

For more information on the volunteer keepers program, call the museum at 386-7195 or visit [www.grandtraverselighthouse.com](http://www.grandtraverselighthouse.com).



**We are open for lunch!**

(11:30-3:00)

With a special menu ...  
or eat out on our new SUN DECK!!!

**BLUE PELICAN'S FAVORITES:**

- Crab Cakes & Tuna Bites
- New York Strip Steak
- Prime Rib
- Seafood - Steamed Shrimp, King Crab, Snow Crab, Clams, Oysters, Steamed Veggies
- Southern Pride - Carolina Pulled Pork, Southern Roasted Chicken Halved, Blue Pelican Ribs

**Kid's Meals Available**

**Delicious Desserts • Cocktails • Beer • Wine**

**DON'T FORGET!**

**Food, Ice, Beer & Wine to go  
Plus Kegs and Rental Taps**

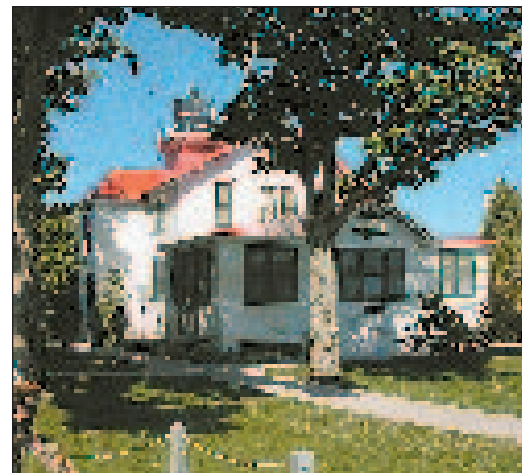
Corner of East Torch Lake Drive &  
W. Old State Rd., Central Lake

**231-544-BLUE (2583)**

Reservations available for parties of 8 or more • Party planning available

Hours: Mon., Wed., Thurs. & Sun. 11:30-9 • Fri. & Sat. 11:30-10 • Closed Tues.

See complete menu - [www.thebluepelican.com](http://www.thebluepelican.com)



Record-Eagle/  
Melanie Bolthouse

**The Grand Traverse Lighthouse was built in 1858 and converted into a museum in 1987.**