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Tower 3 to get a makeover

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will be upgraded: Page 2



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Historic Dewey landmark will be upgraded

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The fire towers lining Route 1 have stood watch over Delaware's beaches since World War II.

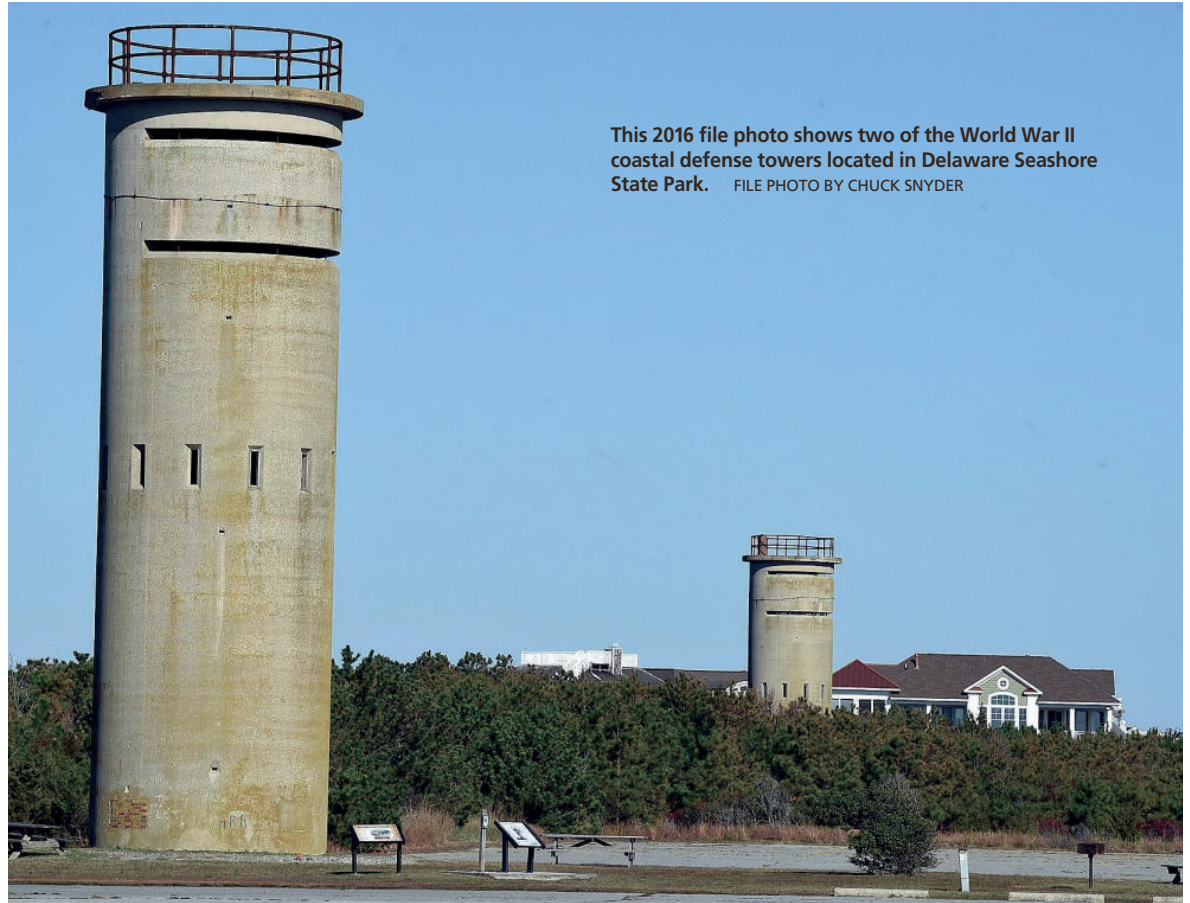
And after countless nor'easters, tropical systems, thunderstorms and winter storms, one is about to get an upgrade.

Just south of Dewey Beach, Tower 3 is getting revamped. The tower will be completely sealed off from the elements, get a new staircase, a new Plexiglas door and some entertainment areas around it.

"The major reason we picked this tower is because the parking and bathhouse, and DelDOT tells us 5 million cars go up and down this highway every year, so it was just common sense to pick this one with the available parking," said Gary Wray, the president of the Fort Miles Historical Association.

"Ultimately, we are going to raise \$2 million to build a pavilion between here and the bathhouse."

A memorandum of understanding was signed between the Fort Miles Historical Association, Delaware Seashore Preservation Foundation and



This 2016 file photo shows two of the World War II coastal defense towers located in Delaware Seashore State Park. FILE PHOTO BY CHUCK SNYDER

Delaware State Parks to have the two "friend" groups work on the towers that line the beaches at the parks.

Cindy Todd, construction administrator for Delaware State Parks, said the relationship between friends groups and state parks help bolster

projects at the parks.

"What we do as the state agency we assist with the project," she said. "We put a sidewalk around the tower and we're going to put a glass door in it to get excitement. This helps get volunteers and money to restore the tower, and from

the state standpoint, we are working with these friends groups. They do the fundraising and we work with them to build it."

The towers have a great history to them, Todd said, and they tell an important part of Delaware's history.

This particular tower, she said, has been broken into, so the friends groups and Delaware State Parks are working to reconstruct the tower to restore it to its former glory.

The work began on the tower in 2006, said Larry

See TOWER, Page 4

Tower

Continued from Page 2

Brown, president of the Delaware Seashore Preservation Foundation, which also helps to run the Indian River Life-Saving Station, which is located roughly a mile south of Tower. A feasibility study was undertaken to determine which tower would be best.

Ultimately, Brown said Tower 3 was determined to be the best location.

"And then we are going to make this more of a

landmark, somewhere like the Life-Saving Station," Brown said. "Once we get a pavilion here, our dream is that here we will be able to hold events similar to what is happening at the lifesaving station and that can help sustain the funds for maintaining this and the park."

Brown said they are hoping to have the project done in five years.

All of the improvements to the tower were generated by the Delaware Seashore Preservation Foundation through grants and public donations, Wray said.

Brown described the partnership between themselves and Delaware Seashore State Park as a public-private partnership.

"I guess the state parks have a certain amount of funding, but they are limited," Brown said. "Most of what they are doing really for maintenance and major efforts for things like this they don't have the budget, so instead of waiting for them to see if it'll happen sometime in the future, we are trying to raise the funds."

Work on the project has already begun. Wray

said a crew of eight volunteers from the Fort Miles Historical Association took out three backhoe bucket loads of bird droppings and other harmful materials from the base of the tower.

There's a master plan that the two friends groups have created for the tower project, Todd said, allowing for many different uses for the tower.

One of the first steps in improving the tower, Wray said, is to illuminate the tower with 11 blue lights around the base, similar to what is seen on the Indian River

Inlet Bridge roughly two miles south of the tower.

This will happen in about a month, he added.

"It's going to be cool," Wray said. "We're going to get a lot of people when we get the pavilion set up in five or six years. We'll get thousands of people stopping here, telling them the story of Fort Miles, telling them the story of the towers, and hopefully they'll pole vault right on up to our museum (at Cape Henlopen State Park)."