

Arts & Entertainment

Tower 3 a beacon in state park's economic contributions



Coastal Point • Tyler Valliant

Tower 3, located south of Dewey Beach in Delaware Seashore State Park, took on a cobalt-drenched tone during a lighting ceremony on Monday, Feb. 12.

By Kerin Magill
Staff Reporter

Against the backdrop of a spectacular sunset, a World War II observation tower became a dramatically lighted landmark on Monday, Feb. 12, while state officials touted the results of a study showing the equally dramatic impact of Delaware's state parks on its economy.

The addition of cobalt-blue lighting to Tower 3, located just south of Dewey Beach in Delaware Seashore State Park, signals the next step in the restoration of the tower, one of 11 built along the Delaware coast between 1939 and 1942. The towers were used to track enemy vessels off the coast. Using triangulation to plot the ship's location, observers then transmitted the information to Fort Miles, now part of Cape Henlopen State Park, where the readings were plotted on a large map.

Using that information, large guns at Fort Miles could then be aimed in the direction of the ships. The guns — with 6-inch, 12-inch and 16-inch barrels — could fire 2,700-pound shells 25 miles. But the guns were never fired at an enemy ship.

Currently, only Tower 7 at Cape Henlopen, which sits next to Fort

Miles, is open to the public. Once the restoration of Tower 3 is complete, plans include opening it to the general public as well, with interpretive tours available. Eventually, the Delaware Shore Preservation Foundation hopes to also open Tower 1 in Fenwick Island State Park and Tower 2 in North Bethany.

Fundraising is under way for the towers restoration project, with a goal of \$500,000 total. The project is a cooperative venture between the Delaware Seashore Preservation Foundation and the Fort Miles Historical Association, which also teamed up in the restoration of Tower 7.

The lighting of Tower 3 came after the presentation of some of the findings of a study, completed last year, on the economic impact of the state parks. The report, commissioned by the Delaware Division of Parks & Recreation, covers the 2016 and 2017 fiscal years. The analysis within the report translates information about "main-purpose" state park visitors into a picture of how those visitors impact the state's economy.

"Main-purpose" visitors are defined in the study as those whose primary purpose is to visit a state park.

The research was conducted by Rockport Analytics, which has offices in

West Chester, Pa., and Baltimore, Md.

Among the study's findings are the following:

- In the 2016/2017 fiscal year, there were an estimated 4.1 million visits to Delaware's 16 state parks. Of that, 1.6 million were considered "primary visitors" — those who traveled at least 50 miles and said a state park was the primary reason for their visit.

- Park visitors were primarily "middle-aged," with 66 percent of them being between the ages of 35 and 64. Only 2 percent of visitors were younger than 25, while 1 percent was older than 75.

- Length of stay for visitors varied, with 19 percent of the visits being day trips, 29 percent one-to-three-night stays, 22 percent four-to-five-night stays and 18 percent staying six or more nights.

- Park visitors spent nearly \$398 million on goods and services in the state in the 2016 fiscal year — an average of \$245 per visitor. Of that total, the study estimated that \$376 million remained in Delaware to contribute to the state's economy.

- Including Delaware State Parks employees, nearly 6,700 full- and part-time jobs were supported by the state parks system in the 2016 fiscal year,

with an average annual wage of \$34,000.

- The state parks with campgrounds made the largest contribution to the state's economy of any of the parks in the statewide parks system, with those parks representing 82 percent of the parks' total economic impact.

- Delaware Seashore State Park had the most visitors and contributed the most money to the state's economy of any of the state parks. Total attendance at DSSP in the 2016 fiscal year was 1,055,800 people. Total visitor spending by DSSP visitors was \$173 million in the 2016 fiscal year.

Speakers at the invitation-only event at Tower 3 on Monday included Gov. John Carney and DSPF Vice President Shirley Price. Carney said that, as he drove south along Route 1 and witnessed the sunset over the bays, "I was really just reminded of what a really special place that we have here in Delaware." He added that what makes it so special is its "natural beauty and natural attributes that we celebrate here."

Carney also lauded the efforts by the two groups that spearheaded the restoration of the tower, as well as state parks employees who help make the state parks the valuable assets that they are.

Price told the crowd in a heated tent next to the tower that plans for the restoration include a computerized system that will be accessible to visitors to help connect the dots in the picture of the state's coastal military history.

She praised the group known as the "Bunker Busters" at Fort Miles, who initiated the often-grueling task of clearing out the abandoned fort and the tower next to it.

"We've made significant progress through their efforts. Great job, guys," she said.

Price said fundraising efforts are "going strong" and have been buoyed by a \$130,000 challenge grant from the Longwood Foundation, which "challenged" the tower project organizers to raise \$300,000 in order to receive the \$130,000. The Coastal Trust Foundation has also given the project a total of \$130,000.

Focus Multisports, Price said, gave the project a running start by providing \$80,000 in funding over three years through the Coastal Delaware Running Festival. Numerous other businesses have contributed to the project, ranging from local banks to artist Ellen Rice, who has contributed a print as a fundraising element.