

Helicopter flights to St. George Reef Lighthouse over Labor Day weekend

September 4, 2023





Visitors to St. George Reef Lighthouse disembarked from the six minute helicopter flight with comments reflecting jaw-dropping awe,: “ incredible, privileged to be a part of history, a once in a lifetime experience “ were a few responses from those who stepped off the helicopter and on to the tarmac.

John Zimmerman, president of St. George Reef Lighthouse Preservation Society (SGRLPS) was extremely pleased with the fundraising efforts generated by the \$350 round trip fare to St. George.

Above and beyond the 120 privileged to visit St. George, the tallest wave-washed lighthouse on the west coast standing 146’ from water line to observation deck. Zimmerman continued, “10 flights a day for three days carried a near capacity of those who personally experienced this incredible lighthouse” SGRLPS also transported 10 skilled craftsmen and docents to work on lighthouse restoration. 20 volunteers helped back at CEC airport.

Awaiting to board the Bell helicopter were Mark abd Jodi Cansdale of North Tonawanda, New York. Mark works at ICC Commonwealth, a company specializing in historic building preservation, including lighthouses. The Cansdale’s were humbled to have the opportunity to step onto the iconic lighthouse.

After his visit, Cansdale shared his initial impression how well the lighthouse has endured over the last 130 years in the face of brutal weather conditions in the Pacific. Cansdale will be submitting a report to SGRLPS in the coming weeks on restoration protocol and plans another visit to Del Norte and St. George, next summer.

Among the visitors was Mark Miller, retired Crescent City Postal worker. During Miller’s Coast Guard enlistment in the 1970’s. He assisted lightkeepers board and disembark via the now-removed boom but he never set foot on the lighthouse. That dream has been fulfilled with Miller personally observing St. George Labor Day week-end.

The Coast Guard oversaw St. George Reef Lighthouse from 1939 to 1975, when the Lighthouse was decommissioned.

Today, Battery Point, St. George Reef Lighthouses and some 800 other lighthouses are obsolete. Technology has replaced the lighthouse with a radar-equipped buoy all vessels must employ to detect dangerous shallow water conditions.

Following the Brother Jonathan tragedy where 225 passengers and crew perished (19 survived the ordeal) after the vessel struck Dragon Rock in 1865, St. George Reef Lighthouse was built in 1882 and over a decade, finally began service in 1892. At that time, St. George was the most expensive lighthouse ever built costing \$715,000.

Zimmerman plans to address the Board of Supervisors in the near future. SGRLPS plans another restoration visit in March and anticipates up to three additional visits accommodating visitors in 2024. The vision of SGRLPS is to restore the one proud sentinel and create a Nature's Classroom for multiple research projects in Marine Biology and related fields. These efforts follow in the footsteps of Guy and Alice Towers who founded the Preservation Society in 1986. The Towers and benefactors Thomas and Mary Bryan paved the way for this restoration project.

Those wishing to contribute or join SGRLPS, please call (541)254-3851 or (707)273-1905. St. George Reef Lighthouse Preservation Society website and Facebook.