



Wayne Sapulski of Livonia, Mich., a Great Lakes lighthouse historian, photographs the inside of the light as he and members of the Toledo Lighthouse Society take a tour of the Toledo Harbor Lighthouse.



A makeshift mannequin occupies a window.



A dog collar hangs from inside the light.

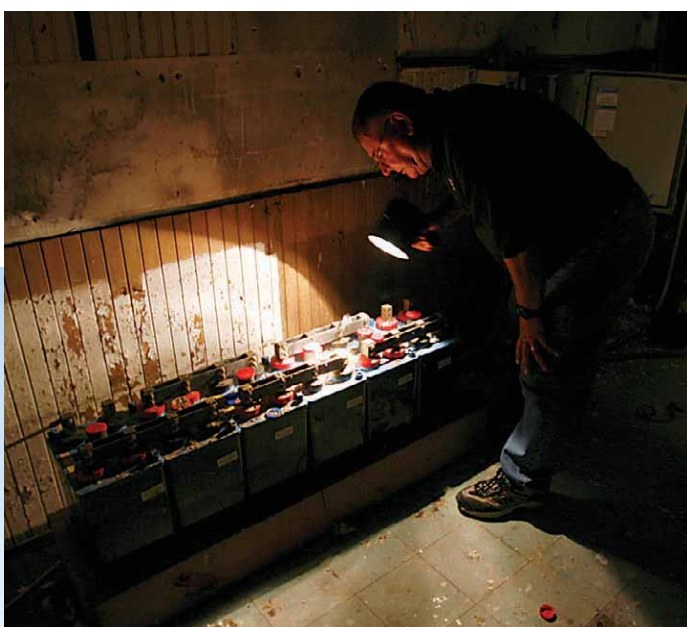
## A Brighter Future

### Group hopes to renovate Toledo Harbor Lighthouse



Gary Ashford, architect with Duket Architects Planners, climbs down the ladder from the light.

BLADE PHOTOS BY ANDY MORRISON



Frank Bihn checks batteries stored inside the lighthouse.

By **JULIE M. MCKINNON**  
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Toledo Harbor Lighthouse's first-floor windows are blocked up and curved acrylic panels have replaced French glass in the lantern room.

Spiders are the main occupants of the 106-year-old Romanesque structure that marks where the shallower Maumee Bay meets Lake Erie.

Members of the nonprofit Toledo Harbor Lighthouse Society, which has owned the lighthouse for about three years, hope to start reversing those unkempt conditions next year. About \$1.5 million in grant money needs to be secured to get the renovation project underway so society "keepers" can take turns staying there and giving tours, said Sandy Bihn, society president.

"It's doable, and it's in good, stable shape," Mrs. Bihn said while enjoying the view on a railed walkway around the lighthouse's lantern room on a recent trip with contractors and others.

Said Gary Ashford of Duket Architects Planners in Toledo: "It was built for permanence, and it was built with care. It's been untouched for 50 years, except for a little stabilizing work done 20 years ago."

The lighthouse's original Fennel lens, which was rotated by a weighted clockwork mechanism and is now on display at Maumee Bay State Park's lodge, could be seen from up to 24 miles away.

And the steel-frame lighthouse

is a piece of the area's history, answering the need to warn ships delivering iron ore and other goods to the Port of Toledo in the early part of the last century and playing a defense role during World War II.

Families working for the U.S. Department of Interior first occupied the four-story lighthouse built on a 20-foot-deep stone crib and standing about five miles north of Maumee Bay State Park's shores. The cost to build the 4,000-square-foot building was not quite \$200,000 between \$10



A broken window stands as a testament to the badly needed repairs.

million and \$12 million in today's dollars, Mr. Ashford said.

The Coast Guard eventually manned the lighthouse until 1966, and rocks were added on three sides of the crib when stabilization work was done in 1989. An automated light and foghorn still do the job of alerting boaters.

Besides its Romanesque arches, the buff-colored lighthouse has rolled steel roofing.

Those features make the lighthouse unique among hundreds of Great Lakes counterparts, said

historian Wayne Sapulski of Livonia, Mich., who is associated with the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association.

"There's no other like it," he said while on a boat trip with Mrs. Bihn to the lighthouse.

It could take three to five years to renovate the lighthouse, including replacing windows, doors, and masonry to secure the structure and installing utilities that will be powered by solar, said Mr. Ashford, the architect.

Mrs. Bihn, who can see Toledo Harbor Lighthouse from her Oregon home, said the plan is to allow research at the building and have two couples stay there three to four days at a time between spring and fall. First priority to act as keepers will be given to society members, and they will give tours to students, passing boaters, and other groups, she said.

They'll join the spiders that have been there for decades, posing a threat to the original light's brightness.

"We had to wash down the cobwebs and spiderwebs about once a week," recalled Robert Nixon of Fremont, an 80-year-old society member and Navy and Coast Guard veteran who was stationed at the lighthouse in the late 1950s.

He preferred playing host to visitors.

"It was always nice to have some company," he said.

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Tom Haines takes a few photographs minutes before landing for a tour of the historical landmark.