

## Keeper of the light

### For Jim Walker, Race Point is a labor of love

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Kathleen Szmít Photo

LIGHTHOUSE MAN – Jim Walker relaxes for a moment in his “Lighthouse Room” at home, surrounded by items that epitomize not only the room’s namesake, but Walker’s passion as well. Walker has overseen Race Point Lighthouse renovations since 1996.

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That Hyannis resident Jim Walker has an affinity for lighthouses is a bit of an understatement. They adorn his yard, line his shelves, and hang on his walls. There is one lighthouse in particular, however, that holds a special place for Walker, having become an integral aspect of his life.

Walker first ventured to Race Point Lighthouse in Provincetown while working with the U.S. Coast Guard. After a six-year stint, he was hired into a civilian position maintaining and repairing Cape lighthouses, including Race Point, where he often ate lunch with the keepers.

It was Walker who oversaw Race Point’s automation in 1972, a process he recalls with mixed emotion as it resulted in his putting the human light keeper out of business – twice. “I automated Race Point in 1972 and then Highland Light in Truro a year later,” Walker recalled. “I put the same keeper out of a job two years in a row.” Thankfully, the two men still speak.

Ten years ago Walker again returned to Race Point, dismayed to see his beloved

lighthouse in utter disrepair, having become ignored and neglected for more than two decades.

It was then that Walker, with the help of two close friends, Bill Collette and Bill Fiske, as well as his own family, embarked on what he now calls his “labor of love,” restoring Race Point to a place of Cape splendor.

The project began inauspiciously, funded largely by whatever spare change the three men could pool together. Walker was determined to preserve what he believes is a vital link to the past of both Cape Cod and the U.S. as well.

“It is an absolute important part of maritime history,” he said. “Lighthouses made the shipping industry what it was, and allowed this country to get ahead in the industrial age. This country wouldn’t be where it was without the lighthouses ensuring safe passage for ships.”

Since that fateful day a decade ago Walker has personally overseen restorations to each of the buildings on the property, from the Keeper’s House, to the Light, and the newest addition, the Whistle house, which was completed just a few weeks ago, ready for its first summer season. Walker notes that all renovations are historically accurate, from the lighthouse’s spiral staircase to the six-panel transom above the main door of the Whistle house.

The Keeper’s house has three guest bedrooms, including the popular “Yellow Room,” all for overnight stays, while the Whistle house can hold up to eight people and is rented on a weekly basis. The rentals bring in the revenues that help support Race Point.

Walker is pleased that Race Point gets its electricity largely through solar panels and, new this year, wind energy through a small wind turbine. In the past a fuel-powered generator was used to run the lights and water pumps. “Nobody wants to listen to a diesel engine running all the time,” said Walker. “We still have the backup generator but even that uses bio-diesel now.”

Beyond green power and historic restorations, Walker says, what makes Race Point so special is its location. “Race Point is two miles off of paved roads,” he said. “Right now the whales are there, playing. It is one of the few places on the East coast where the sun sets into the ocean.”

While Walker admits that returning Race Point to a place of beauty has been a long process, it is such characteristics that keep him motivated. “At the end of the day with your feet up on the railing and a glass of wine,” he said. “It makes it all worthwhile.”

**For more information about Race Point Lighthouse, visit [www.racepointlighthouse.net](http://www.racepointlighthouse.net) .**



Photo by TomKenworthy