



## A Swim to Save Whaleback Lighthouse on December 7

As many people in our region know, Gary Sredzienski is a world-renowned accordionist who is also known as “Creekman” because of his amazing swimming exploits in the waterways around Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and Kittery, Maine. Each winter, Gary chooses a charity to benefit from his extraordinary efforts. To date, his six charity swims have raised more than \$60,000 in total. For his “Swim for the Lights” in February 2011, Gary swam five miles in the Piscataqua River and raised \$10,000 for our cause. This December, Gary is focusing his efforts on Whaleback Lighthouse as well as his “home creek,” Spruce Creek in Kittery.



Gary “Creekman” Sredzienski during his 2011 Swim for the Lights

On December 7, Gary will swim five miles in frigid waters (below 40F) to raise funds and awareness for the restoration of Whaleback Lighthouse. We are working to establish a permanent dock at the lighthouse to facilitate further restoration and public tours. To honor Gary’s incredible commitment with a donation to our cause, visit [www.portsmouthharborlighthouse.org](http://www.portsmouthharborlighthouse.org)

Gary will begin his swim about 2:00 p.m. from the edge of the parking lot at the Kittery Trading Post on Spruce Creek (301 U.S. Route 1, Kittery, ME). He will start his swim about 2:00 p.m. at the Kittery Trading Post. He will follow Spruce Creek and will continue in the Piscataqua River all the way to Whaleback Lighthouse. The projected finish time is 4:30 p.m. at Whaleback Lighthouse. We have something very special in mind when Gary reaches Whaleback, including the illumination of the lighthouse with a special lighting display.



The Serfs

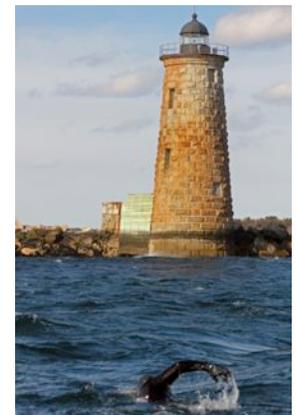
As if that isn’t enough, Gary and his popular band, The Serfs, will perform at an evening “Holiday Beach Party” after the swim, from 7 to 9 p.m. on Dec. 7 in the Star Theatre at the Kittery Community Center, 120 Rogers Road, Kittery, ME. Admission to the party is \$10, but you get a free ticket if you make a donation of \$100 or larger for the swim. Along with live music, there will be refreshments and a silent auction at the evening party. Advance tickets are recommended. Visit [www.portsmouthharborlighthouse.org](http://www.portsmouthharborlighthouse.org) for tickets and more information.

## An Interview with “Creekman”

**Question:** What is so special about Whaleback Lighthouse?

**Gary Sredzienski:** I consider Whaleback to be the most important structure and symbol of the New Hampshire/Maine coastal region. It still functions as a working lighthouse and is the most important cultural and historical symbol of our region. I write a diary of my swims to try to capture the emotions of those special times in the water. I looked up my writings from my 2011 “Swim for the Lights” and came across what I wrote about Whaleback ... while my brain was still frozen just a few hours after I got out of the water:

"You can't really appreciate a lighthouse until you're in the water swimming toward it. You see them a million times from land or a boat, but I never experienced such a magnetism until I tried to reach her from within the water -- like a baby crawling towards its mother. She looks like a very large old and wise grandmother, as if she's inviting me, asking me to come, saying she's there for me. A warmth that's now imprinted on my soul. She feels alive when you swim up to her. Brought me back to a day when I was so innocent and humble like an infant. We all lost those memories but I was blessed to have felt it once again. I am blessed to feel my weakness, to feel my body collapse on that island, to be humbled was to be blessed. And through it all she was like a mother standing watching over me. To swim where no one goes, to have the honor of my body in that area where the Great Piscataqua River meets the sea. A most dangerous place where lives were lost, yet it felt like home and she like a friend, in my own familiar backyard. To have the honor of meeting this great lady of nobility."



Interview continued on page 3

**Portsmouth Harbor Light Postage Stamp Dedicated in July Event**



*The unveiling of the stamp, painted by Howard Koslow. Photo by William Marshall.*

On Saturday morning, July 13, more than 200 people gathered in the shade of a tent on Coast Guard Station Portsmouth Harbor to celebrate the release of a new Forever® stamp featuring Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse in New Castle, NH.

Speakers at the event included: Master of Ceremonies Richard Coughlin, U.S. Postal Service Northern New England District; Boatswains Mate Chief David Andreesen, officer in charge of Coast Guard Station Portsmouth Harbor; Patricia Cohen, New Castle Selectwoman; Maggie Hassan, governor of the state of New Hampshire; Bob Trapani, Jr., executive director of the American Lighthouse Foundation; John Cantwell, U.S. Postal Service Northern New England District; and Jeremy D’Entremont, operations manager of Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouses. Statements were read by representatives of Senator Kelly Ayotte and Representative Carol Shea-Porter of New Hampshire.



*Governor Maggie Hassan spoke at the stamp dedication with Whaleback Lighthouse behind her. Photo by William Marshall.*

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Sharon D’Urso, postmaster of the Town of New Castle. The National Anthem was sung by Liesl Quigley of Kennebunkport, Maine, and she also read the poem *The Lighthouse* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Following the ceremony, well over 200 people were given volunteer-led tours of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse.

The new stamp is one of a series of five in the U.S. Postal Service’s New England Coastal Lighthouse series. Simultaneous dedication events were held at all five locations on July 13.

**Work Project Completed at Whaleback Lighthouse**

During the week of September 22, 2013, a work crew from J.B. Leslie Company of South Berwick, Maine, completed a major renovation project at Whaleback Lighthouse. Earlier this summer, a J.B. Leslie crew completed a cleanup of all loose lead paint and other materials inside the lighthouse.



*Jim Leslie of J.B. Leslie Company at Whaleback Lighthouse. Photo by Bob Trapani, Jr.*

The \$7000 project entailed the following:

- Removing all rust from the surface of the ironwork on the lantern level, and treating the cleaned areas with a rust inhibitor.
- Coating the cleaned areas with an oil-based primer and applying two coats of marine paint.
- Re-caulking seams in the lantern deck to prevent water ingress.
- Replacing two cracked panes of glass in the lantern and re-caulking around all the lantern windowpanes.
- Re-caulking around the tower’s glass block windows.
- Re-establishing the hasp and other hardware on the entry door in order to securely lock the tower, and repainting the door.



*Photo by Jim Leslie*

Bob Trapani, Jr., executive director of the American Lighthouse Foundation, commented on the completed project: “Talk about a gleam that catches one’s eye! In the wake of this maintenance project, the lantern does not only look fabulous to view, but it is also an uplifting sight for the spirits of its preservationists.

“Anyone who has observed Whaleback Lighthouse during a big storm or seen the dramatic photos of massive waves slamming the tower, can imagine how the raging elements exact an unforgiving toll on the historic structure. To see this kind of important work completed – and just in time for the upcoming winter storm season, is wonderful!

“As for the work that the J.B. Leslie Company carried out at Whaleback,” he added, “all I can say is that the keepers of old would have beamed with pride at the professional workmanship and the beautiful end result. Hats off as well for ALF’s Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouses.

“This kind of milestone in the history of Whaleback Lighthouse does not happen without the dedication and vigilance of modern day “keepers” who must raise vital public awareness and funds one person at a time. A job well done by everyone.”



*The newly painted lantern. Photo by Bob Trapani, Jr.*

**Interview with “Creekman” (cont. from first page)**

**Question:** You'll be swimming in your "home creek," Spruce Creek, this time. Does that make this swim special to you?

**Gary:** Very special for the number 7 swim. I get to highlight the "home ball field" estuary on this event. When folks ask where I live, I always say Spruce Creek, not Kittery, but The Creek. It's why I live here. The creek truly is my home. I know nearly every inch of her. Spruce Creek is a mini-Great Bay in Kittery and has been the best training ground for open water winter swimming. Bottom line, it's colder than Great Bay because it's a shallow creek. A great deal of its bottom is exposed to frigid temperatures when the water runs out. It's been the place for me to toughen up because temperatures are always 10 to 15 degrees colder here in winter than in the ocean. It's been my official training ground for all 6 of my so far completed swims. She's been my greatest coach and friend through it all. The coldest water temperatures that I've measured in this region are in some of the fingers off the main body of Spruce Creek with temperatures I measured at 28 F. It will be 10 degrees or more colder at the start than at the finish.

The water in the creek is constantly moving. It's been a great place to develop strength swimming against its outgoing and incoming tides that are deceptive and very strong. Also, being somewhat narrow, it's a very strong wind tunnel. Sometimes the winds are stronger than the tides and when they collide in opposite directions the water becomes hell. Extremely irritable and choppy with whiteheads, it becomes real rough and challenging to swim in. All fine ingredients for exhaustion and hypothermia. It always beats me up. It's also quite long. When I moved to Spruce Creek from Chauncey Creek I kept saying that it was moving from whiffle ball to the Major Leagues. The size of the fish and seals coming in are also quite humbling. It's a creek that makes you both physically and mentally tough. I've made this creek my home since I moved to this area in the '90s. Swimming its length the other night to get home from the Piscataqua in the dark -- all I can say that there's no scarier feeling. More scary than any Halloween or Freddy Kruger movie! When I'm in it my mind tells me that mammals just don't belong here this time of year, especially after dark when planets appear over the horizon and stars light your way underwater.

*Continued below*

**In the 2013 season, Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse welcomed a record 5200 visitors at open houses and other events, including people from at least 42 states and 14 foreign countries. For details about Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouses and information on our events, visit [www.portsmouthharborlighthouse.org](http://www.portsmouthharborlighthouse.org)**

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**Interview with “Creekman” (cont.)**

**Question:** What are some of your favorite aspects of swimming in winter?

**Gary:** The desolation and peacefulness of the setting. There are no boats, no jet skis, even the crabs are deeply submerged in the mud. No possible bull sharks coming in. I think they all moved south with the senior citizens of the area. The vast swimming pool is all mine. Acres and acres, miles of waterways all to myself and I won't see a soul. A world that goes on that no one even knows exists. What happens on the news in society has no bearing or meaning under the water in these areas. This underwater world has been there for centuries and will hopefully remain ancient for centuries to come.

for me to fight winter depression and lack of light. The extreme natural high that comes from it. Perhaps the best part is to be able to see eagles and swim with loons. Loons return to Spruce Creek every winter and follow me for great distances. Their companionship is priceless. And of course, another fun aspect is confusing and freaking out passing cars and the neighbors this time of year as they stare from icy windows locked inside.

of the river. We have to speak out for her. We have to be her actual voice. It sits and continually works there as a symbol of our region, still lights the way for incoming and outgoing commerce. People far and near stare at her beauty in the harbor, homes on the water have their windows framed around the lighthouse, yet no one ever considers that it's subject to strong corrosive forces of nature and needs regular maintenance to remain there. It's a fragile structure.



*Gary on the rocks at Whaleback in 2011*



*During Gary's December 2012 swim for the Center for Wildlife*



*Gary at the top of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse*

**Question:** Aside from the money being raised, what do you see as the goal of the event?

**Gary:** Whaleback is subliminal to so many. I want to make people aware that it's a working historical structure and to set it in their conscious state, that it just didn't rise out of the sea on its own, doesn't sit there on its own under the care of God. I'm shocked about how neglected Whaleback is. You never hear about it at town meetings on either side

Besides the care given by the American Lighthouse Foundation, I think communities on both sides of the river should be more involved in its care. Perhaps this swim could inspire schools to consider adopting this structure as their own. For more people to be involved in its care. There are a very minute handful of people taking care of it. This has to change, it has to grow. It takes a community to care for a lighthouse.



## Membership in Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouses

We'd love to have you as a member. Members receive discounts on FPHL merchandise at events, and receive our newsletter and emails with up-to-the-minute news and announcements. Memberships at the \$100 level and higher also include a \$25 "assistant keeper" membership in the American Lighthouse Foundation. Also, please let us know if you're interested in volunteering at open houses or other events. To join, please fill out the form below and mail with a check or money order (payable to FPHL) and mail to Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouses PO Box 8232, Portsmouth, NH 03802-8232. You can also join through our website at [www.portsmouthharborlighthouse.org](http://www.portsmouthharborlighthouse.org).

Annual dues (dues in all categories and other donations are tax-deductible):

Commissioner: \$500 \_\_\_ Inspector: \$250 \_\_\_ Keeper: \$100 \_\_\_ Assistant Keeper: \$50 \_\_\_

Family Membership: \$25 \_\_\_ Individual Membership: \$15 \_\_\_ Child Membership (12 or under): \$5 \_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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You may also pay with a Visa or MasterCard. Please fill in your name and contact information above along with the credit card information below.

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