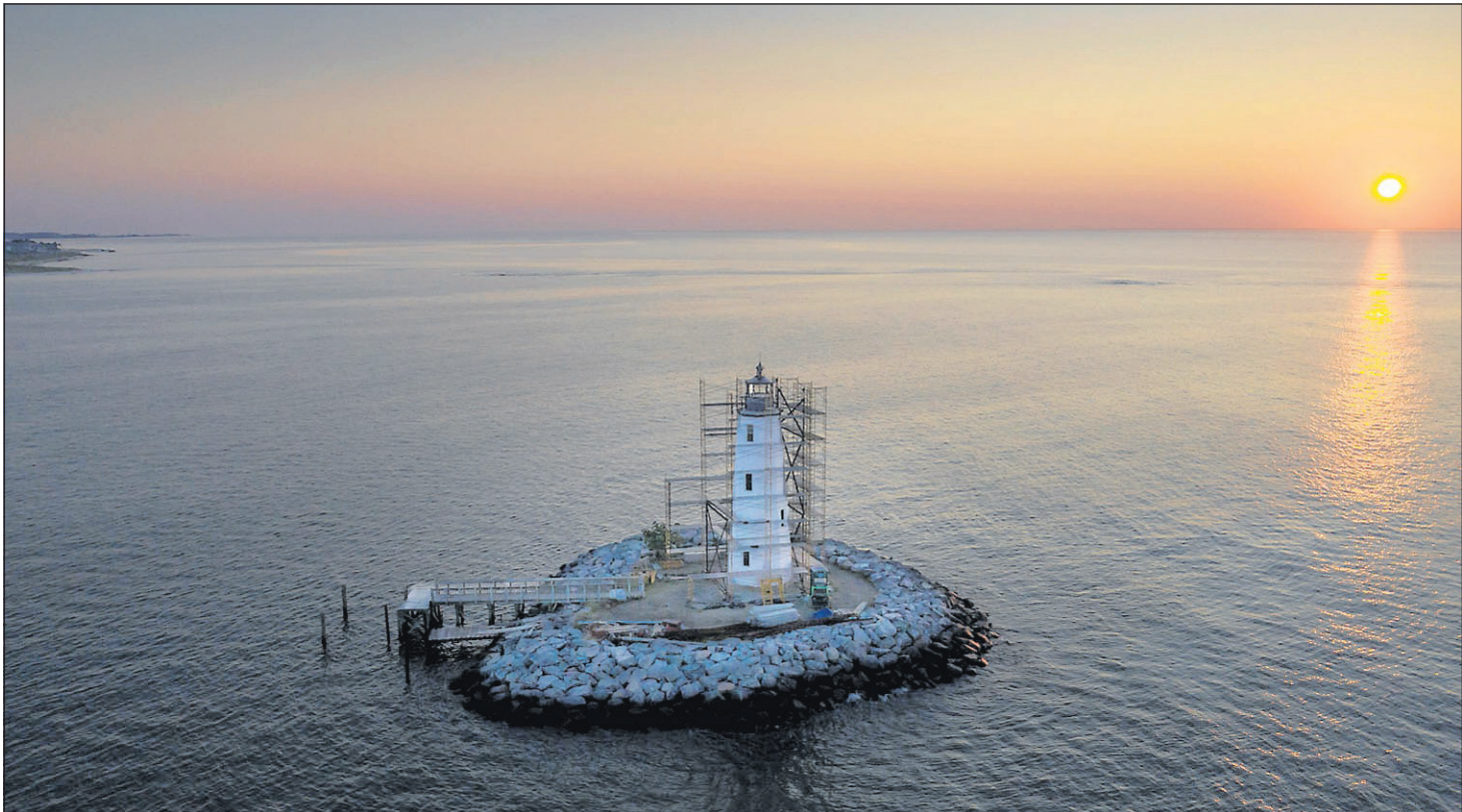


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DOUG ROGERS PHOTOGRAPHY

The New Point Comfort Lighthouse, located at the southern tip of Mathews County, where the Chesapeake Bay meets Mobjack Bay, underwent a lengthy \$1.8 million restoration, which included structural repairs and stabilizing the surrounding island.

## New look brightens an old lighthouse in Mathews

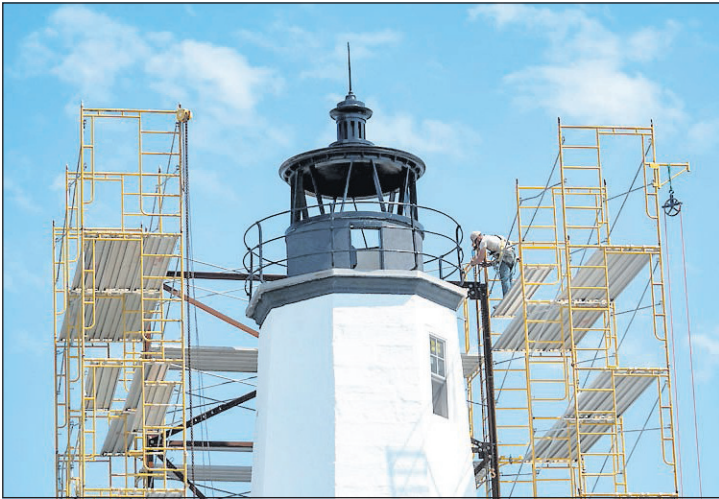


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On precisely the sort of murky evening a lighthouse is intended to shine, the historic New Point Comfort Lighthouse at the southern tip of Mathews County flashed to life.

Even though the third-oldest lighthouse on the Chesapeake Bay has been dark for most of the last half-century and its new light had been long awaited, the moment of re-awakening last Tuesday happened a little quicker than expected.

Gary Wayne Brownley, 83, a local woodworker of note and friend of the late Earl Soles,



DOUG ROGERS PHOTOGRAPHY

The New Point Comfort Lighthouse was first lighted in 1805 to help make the Chesapeake Bay safe for commercial shipping.

the driving force behind the lengthy restoration of the lighthouse, was in the process of delivering a speech as a final lead-up to the grand relighting. More than a mile away on the tiny island where the light-

house stands, a small crew prepared to flip the switch on the new light, watching for a signal from an observation walkway at the New Point Comfort Natural Area Preserve, where members of the community

had gathered in the mist to celebrate.

As Brownley spoke, someone apparently turned on a flashlight, which the group on the island mistook for the signal — and the light was turned on. The resulting hoopla made it impossible — and unnecessary — for Brownley to continue.

“I’d been practicing that darn thing all day long,” Brownley said with a laugh the next day about his speech. “I had it down pat.”

But he spoke long enough to make his most important point: A lot of effort went into bringing the old lighthouse back from the brink.

The sandstone structure was first lighted in 1805, during the administration of President Thomas Jefferson, authorized by Congress along with other lighthouses as a way to make the Chesapeake Bay safe for commercial shipping. (Of the

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After many years of darkness, the New Point Comfort Lighthouse has a new light, which was turned on Oct. 12.

remaining lighthouses on the bay, only Cape Henry and Old Point are older.) New Point Comfort Lighthouse stands where the waters of the Chesapeake Bay converge with Mobjack Bay. Travelers from the south would see the beacon and know to make a left into Mobjack Bay or veer right and head toward Baltimore. When it was built, the lighthouse stood on an island of about 100 acres at the entrance to Mobjack Bay just off Mathews’ southernmost peninsula, and was reachable by foot at low tide. However, erosion commenced almost immediately, and over the centuries storms and shifting sands have severed easy accessibility to the lighthouse, which now resides on a postage stamp-size piece of land, protected by riprap, a long distance from shore. For more than 150 years, the lighthouse served navigators in the bay, except when its light went out during the War of 1812—when the British ransacked it—and the Civil War, when it also suffered damage that required extensive repairs.