

# Repairs to historic lighthouse near completion

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**By Robyn Bardgett**

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Something bright and flashy has been missing from the South Shore for several months.

But the Gibbs Hill Lighthouse is close to being back in operation.

Currently, four fixed lights are the temporary light for the lighthouse after it was severely damaged by Hurricane Fabian last September. The structure has been undergoing extensive refurbishment over the last couple of months.

One of the main projects was to install bearings underneath the light's turntable, and fix and reinstall the lens, which, before the hurricane, floated in mercury.

"We wanted to keep the historical look of the structure so we replaced it (the mercury) with ball bearings," said Michael Dolding of Marine and Ports who is overseeing the refurbishment. "It turns on the ball bearings just as it did in the mercury."

Lighthouse consultant James "Woody" Woodward, whose company (James Woodward Lighthouse Consulting) was hired to fix the lens, explained when the lighthouse was damaged from the hurricane the mercury contaminated parts of the structure.

Mr. Woodward and his team of three from Cleveland, Ohio have been working on the replacement of the lens for two weeks. James Dunlap, Kurt Fosburg and Frank Blaha bring over 80 years of lighthouse experience to the job.

"I came in December to inspect the project and then in February my team came for a week and disassembled the lens. Then we ordered the bearings which took 14 weeks to get from the manufacturer. The bearings have to be tremendously accurate so it's not as if they are laying on a shelf waiting to be bought," Mr. Woodward said.

Yesterday, the team was finishing the replacement of the lens – which weighs nearly two tonnes. Mr. Woodward said he hopes the lens will be finished by Monday. After that, the wiring will be installed and Mr. Dolding said the light should be operational in two weeks.

Over the two weeks that the men have been working they said they have covered roughly three miles going up and down the stairs of Gibbs Hill.

But, Mr. Woodward said the response from people on the Island about how much they "miss" the light from the lighthouse has been worth it.

"Many of the lighthouses are being replaced with automated lights," he said. "We appreciate that the Government put the money into this very specialised lens."

Overall, the Government has spent approximately \$250,000 on repairing the lens, Mr. Dolding said.

"It's important because the lens is from 1904 and it is a unique optic for that period that is irreplaceable because technology has changed."

Marine and Ports is also working alongside Works and Engineering to repair the glass and railings in the observatory.

The outside of the lighthouse will also be repainted.



Photo by Glenn Tucker Light fixing: James "Woody" Woodward, the lighthouse consultant here fixing the lens at Gibbs Hill Lighthouse.