



A year at the pier

Photo chronicle part of 'Lighting the Lake' event at Box Factory

By JOHN MATUSZAK
HP Staff Writer

ST. JOSEPH — For more than 100 years, life has ebbed and flowed around the St. Joseph lighthouses as they guided ships and provided inspiration for artists and lovers and dreamers.

The weather changes, the waters storm and then are still, the skies blaze with color or are blanketed by clouds. People come to the pier to start new chapters in their lives, or close old ones.

"There is only one thing that doesn't change. That is the lighthouses. They are the constant," said photographer Laura Kraklau, who has produced "View 366," a book of images of the historic icons taken every day for a year (actually, a leap year, hence the 366).

Kraklau's book, along with poetry and other works centering on the lighthouses, will be part of "Lighting the Lake," at 7 p.m. Friday at the Box Factory for the Arts in St. Joseph.

Kraklau will speak about her project and sign copies of the 229-page book, for sale at \$65. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to the Lighthouse Forever Fund, which is raising money to restore the lighthouses, built in 1907 and acquired by the city of St. Joseph last year.

The event also benefits the Box Factory's Writers Studio and First Friday Film series.

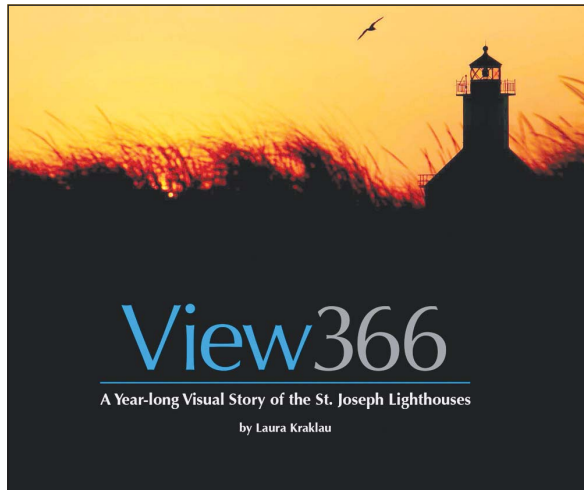
Along with the photographs, winners of recent contests for poetry and photography inspired by the lighthouses will be announced. "Lighting the Lake," a chapbook of the poetry with historical photos and the winning photograph on the cover, will be available.

The film "Painting the St. Joseph Lighthouse with Bob Fagan," will show the lighthouses — inside and out — from an artist's perspective. The film, by Douglas, Mich., filmmaker John Leben, was part of a PBS series entitled "Painting on Location with Bob Fagan."

Standing out

There are several things that make the St. Joseph lighthouses unique, Kraklau observed.

Their position on the North Pier provides a backdrop of freighters and sailboats, strollers and wind surfers, all surrounded by the changing moods of the lake and sky. "It's probably one of the most photographed lighthouses on Lake Michigan for that reason."



Don Campbell / HP staff

TOP: Laura Kraklau is pictured Thursday at her studio in the Box Factory for the Arts in St. Joseph. Kraklau has recently published a book titled "View 366: A Year-Long Visual Story of the St. Joseph Lighthouses." ABOVE: The cover of Kraklau's recently published book.

Kraklau didn't have any difficulty finding unique perspectives on a daily basis.

"It's amazing how new and fresh and different it stayed the entire year," Kraklau said.

The project brought a life-long interest in photography into focus for Kraklau, who until recently was the director of public relations and marketing for Lake Michigan College.

The St. Joseph native first peered through a lens while tagging along after her grandmother, an avid photographer who enjoyed shooting the lighthouses and other outdoor scenes.

She gave little Laura a Brownie Kodak camera to practice with, and imparted lessons about such elements as composition.

"She taught me to pay attention to

IF YOU GO

What: "Lighting the Lake"

When: 7 p.m. Friday

Where: Box Factory for the Arts, 1101 Broad St., St. Joseph

How much: \$10

Contact: 983-3688 or www.boxfactoryforthearts.org

everything around me, not just the focal point, but to all of the elements," Kraklau said.

After graduating from St. Joseph High in 1985 and later Michigan State University, Kraklau concentrated on her marketing career and didn't have much time for photography.

When she picked her camera up again, she found herself gravitating toward the lighthouses and the

lakeshore.

On one occasion she was at the shore three nights in a row, and had the idea of shooting every day for a year to chronicle the changing scene.

Her start date was Aug. 26, 2011, and she took pictures every day until Aug. 25,

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2012 – no vacations, no sick days – averaging around 100 frames at a time.

Her mother, Deloris Catania, later suggested she turn the images into a book.

The results are as much a snapshot of life in St. Joe as a tribute to the lighthouses which are in every frame, sometimes in the background and in others front and center.

Kraklau captured stunning sunsets, such as “Molten Lava,” and more subdued days.

She never staged a photograph, and surprises constantly appeared.

“Apocalyptic Sunset” caught the “surreal” horizon heightened by the haze of a distant Minnesota forest fire.

She spied Mennonites and newlyweds on the pier, and “Love Letters” left in the sand.

At the edge of one frame she titled “Rest in Peace,” a group pours the ashes of a loved one into the water. Kraklau didn’t notice them in the photo until she got back to her studio.

On her last day of shooting, Kraklau saw a freighter sitting majestically along the horizon. Later she learned from the local news the ship had run aground – as if waiting for her to come along.

Putting it together

When it came to arranging the photos and designing the book, Kraklau turned to Mike Johnson, a graphic designer with whom she had worked on many projects at Lake Michigan College. Johnson also did the layout for the popular “24/7” book of photos of St. Joseph and Benton Harbor. Holland Litho is handling the printing, with an initial

run of 2,000.

Kraklau, who has had a studio at the Box Factory for two years, included text for about 70 percent of the photos, setting the scene or adding historical information.

All the while she was gathering her photos, she wasn’t aware that the city was in the process of obtaining the lighthouses, declared surplus in 2008, or that a fundraising campaign would be launched to raise \$2 million for renovations.

Kraklau delayed publication for a year, until 2014, “because I wanted to get it right.”

That publication date coincided with the Lighthouse Forever Fund campaign. “We thought, ‘Wow, that is really good timing.’”

In the three years since she started her project, Kraklau has seen rust creep over the exterior of the inner light. The initial work by the city will be to paint and seal the structure from moisture. Later, officials want to refurbish the interior and open it to the public.

Kraklau wants her book to remind people of how important it is to save the lighthouses.

“I hope it gives people a sense that this is truly a landmark,” Kraklau said. “People are connected with this in St. Joe. It’s part of the fabric of our lives.”

Tickets for the “Lighting the Lake” event are \$10 and include one free drink ticket. Wine and beer will be available for purchase and light refreshments will be served.

Tickets can be purchased online with PayPal at www.boxfactoryforthearts.org, or with credit card at 983-3688. Tickets will also be available at the door the night of the event.

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