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MY FAVORITE PROJECT WITH
The Gutter Guys
by Mary Thomas

SHE LOOKS PRETTY GOOD FOR A 150-YEAR-OLD, considering the constant beating she takes from the Atlantic Ocean. But she wasn't always in such great shape.

The Absecon Lighthouse, a stately beauty that sits at the north end of Atlantic City overlooking Absecon Inlet, shone its first light in 1857. In terms of height, it ranks first in New Jersey and third in the United States. It guided mariners and helped define the shoreline for many years, but gradually fell into a state of disrepair. In 1933, the lighthouse was decommissioned and its light was extinguished. In the decades to follow, the lighthouse received occasional attention, but continued to suffer from exposure to the elements and lack of proper care.

In the late 1980s, a coalition of concerned local citizens formed the Inlet Public/Private Association (IPPA) in an effort to revitalize the area. Restoring the Absecon Lighthouse was one of IPPA's top goals, and the group got to work raising funds to return the two-acre lighthouse property to its former glory. The renovated tower opened to the public in 1999, and the reconstructed keeper's cottage was unveiled in 2001.

"The keeper's cottage is a replica of the original 1925 structure, which served as the family home for the head lighthouse keeper," says Jean Muscanic, executive director of the Absecon Lighthouse. One of Muscanic's first tasks was to get the cottage gutters replaced.

"Since we're a nonprofit, I needed to call around to different companies to make sure I was going to get a good price," says Muscanic. "In the end, we chose The Gutter Guys because they had the product we needed, [they] offered us a great price and they have such an excellent reputation."

Bill Bradley, vice president at The Gutter Guys headquarters in Atlantic County, is glad the company got the call. "Although we don't do a lot of lighthouses, we've put gutters on more than 200,000 homes since we opened our doors in 1988," he says. "Copper gutters are one of our specialties, so we were well suited for this job."

The New Jersey Historic Trust advised Muscanic to use half-round copper gutters on the cottage as a way of remaining true to the structure's origins. When The Gutter

Guys arrived to review the project, they reinforced the decision to go with copper. "Along the coast, copper holds up really well and won't corrode," says Bradley. "Copper can last 50 years or so, where aluminum can't give you the same guarantee."

The Gutter Guys installed approximately 390 linear feet of 6-inch half-round copper gutters, wrapping them around both of the cottage's distinctive rooflines. Another 220 feet of 4-inch round copper downspouts lead water away from the roof and the foundation.

During installation, the elements posed the primary challenge to the onsite team. "It's always tough working along the coast, considering the high winds and stormy weather," says Bradley. "Also, copper is so much heavier than aluminum, so it can be more difficult to maneuver."

But to The Gutter Guys, the lighthouse project was more than just another job. Although the company has 13 offices serving Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and NJ, "we're still a local company based in a neighboring town, so we had an emotional connection to this work," says Bradley. "It meant a lot to be able to preserve such a great historic part of the area."

According to Muscanic, The Gutter Guys can also be proud of a job well done. "From the people in the office to the guys who came out and did the installation, every single person was professional and courteous and had excellent skills," she says. "They didn't cut corners or rush to get the job done. The goal was always to get it done well and do it right."

Three years after the gutters were installed, Muscanic reports that they are weathering beautifully. "When they were first in, they were very shiny," she says. "Now, the shininess has faded into a very pretty tone, and we're looking forward to that wonderful patina color that will eventually come through." ■

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