

[From Fall 2006]

## **Lighthouse Open During Pony Penning Week**

The Assateague Island Lighthouse which attracts hundreds of visitors each weekend was closed on June 17th after a piece of metal broke loose, fell from the upper gallery and landed on the lower gallery. As a precaution, the structure and the trail leading to it were closed for safety reasons so an engineer could inspect it and assess the situation. Until a more permanent resolution can be made, construction netting has been placed around the upper gallery to catch any other pieces that might fall. On July 14th the tower was reopened to delight visitors.

For the first time, the lighthouse expanded visitation during pony penning week. It was open from Wednesday, July 26, through Sunday, July 30. While visitation was slow on the morning of the pony swim, a family of four from Germany was thrilled to see the swim from the top of the lighthouse. Having arrived at the water's edge before 7 a.m., they grew tired of waiting for the swim and decided to see the lighthouse instead. As they climbed the last few steps up into the glass enclosed area that houses the fight, the ponies hit the water. They said it was a sight they would never forget.

On the Thursday following the swim, 292 people made the climb up 198 steps to the top while an additional 161 people visited but did not make the climb. Despite high heat and humidity, 360 people climbed to the top on Friday and, again, one family was rewarded when they saw the ponies returning to Assateague. A father and his young son from Idaho were the lucky pair and were happy at their good timing. In all, over 1,200 people climbed the lighthouse during the five days and over 300 stopped in to look over the lower area, learn about the lighthouse, its history and visit the gift shop. Visitors came from across the country and around the world.

Artists exhibiting in the oil shed this year have been pleased with the numbers of people who have come in to browse and sometimes to buy. Art shows have been held most weekends and will continue through the fall. Over the Labor Day weekend the lighthouse will be open Friday through Monday and will continue its regular schedule of Friday through Sunday from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. until Thanksgiving weekend which will mark the end of the 2006 season.