

Hurricane fire tower advocate dies

Husband will give \$5,000 for tower repairs

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Article Photos



State Department of Environmental Conservation spokesman Dave Winchell offers Gretna Longware a hand at a public hearing on the Hurricane Mountain fire tower in March at Keene Central School. A longtime advocate of the fire tower, Longware died on April 22. (Enterprise file photo — Mike Lynch)

Longtime Hurricane Mountain fire tower advocate Gretna Longware died in late April, but her husband of 59 years, Melvin, is continuing the Elizabethtown couple's quest to save the fire tower.

Gretna, 77, died April 22 after a long battle with cancer.

In recent years, she spearheaded a Hurricane Mountain fire tower friends group. Among her accomplishments was gathering more than 6,000 signatures to save the fire tower.

At a public hearing at the Keene Central School in March regarding the Hurricane fire tower, Gretna said she would put \$5,000 in her will for the fire tower. She didn't do that but Melvin said he has created a bank account for fire tower repairs.

"What I did is, two days before they made their last decision, I made a deposit for \$5,000, and I will buy the material to repair the tower," the 80-year-old Melvin said. "If the DEC will do the labor, I'll buy the paint, the roofing, the lumber they need. If it comes to more than that, I'll put more in it. So they don't have any excuse not to do it."

The state Department of Environmental Conservation is proposing to remove the tower in order to comply with the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan. The tower is located on land classified as primitive and intended to eventually become wilderness, which doesn't allow for fire towers.

The proposal to remove the tower has received strong opposition because of its historic value to the Park.

Fire observers were first stationed on Hurricane Mountain in 1910. The tower was erected in 1919 and used for fire surveillance until 1973.

Melvin has a special attachment to the tower. His great uncle, Joseph Denton, was Hurricane Mountain's first fire observer in 1910. Plus, his uncle John Longware was the forest ranger in charge of supervising the fire tower from 1920 to 1950.

Melvin said that before his wife died, she was excited at the prospect the tower might be saved.

"She lived long enough to hear the tower may be saved," Melvin said. "That's all she could talk about."

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