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## Grassy Island Range Lights still shine after 150

BY JANELLE FISHER  
STAFF WRITER

GREEN BAY – Once a guiding light for ships coming into the Port of Green Bay, the Grassy Island Range Lights still stand — thanks to a little help from some friends — 150 years after they were built.

Lighthouse Keeper Wayne Dunbar, who has been with the Grassy Island Range Lights since 2001, was among many who first saved and then helped to restore the lighthouses to their former glory.

Built in 1872, the Grassy Island Range Lights origi-

nally guided sailing ships through the sandbars of the lower Bay into the safety of the Fox River, Dunbar said.

“As range lights, a captain will align his ship with the two lights, which will assure the ship is in the center of the channel leading into the mouth of the Fox River and the Green Bay harbor.”

After almost a century of guiding ships into the harbor, Dunbar said plans to expand the shipping channel in the 1960s nearly marked the end of the lighthouses’ existence.

See LIGHTS page 13



Built in 1872, the Grassy Island Range Lights have been painstakingly restored by volunteers in celebration of their 150th anniversary with an open house from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday at the Green Bay Yachting Club at

## The smile supplier

### Local woodworker exports joy around the world

BY JOSH STALOCH  
CORRESPONDENT

GREEN BAY – Eleven years ago, local woodworker Rick Brunner, founder of Rick’s Toybox, Inc. in Green Bay, was having medical issues so severe



Local woodworker Rick Brunner has hand-crafted and delivered thousands of wooden toys to children throughout the United States and around the world.

Submitted Photo

they were threatening his quality of life. Cognitive problems and other health challenges were making it difficult for Brunner to get through his days, he said.

“It seemed like my future was just getting so wrapped up with medical issues,” Brunner said. “I needed to refocus and kind of help myself out. My future wasn’t very bright at all.”

Working a 9-to-5 job in the woodworking industry at the time, his road back to feeling better began with a bird house.

Brunner said his first few bird houses were elaborate, with a log cabin look and roofs made of cedar.

He said those efforts at creative woodworking got him through some very difficult times in the early stages of his medical problems.

“A side effect of one of my treatments was really bad shaking, almost like Parkinson’s, where you would get tremors,” Brunner said. “They had no idea if it was going to go away or not. So I came up with a challenge for myself. I found a low income daycare and decided to make 50 bird houses. At the time, I couldn’t even hold a hammer and a nail because my tremors were so bad.”

See TOYS page 15



Nearly 1,500 people braved the rain Saturday in downtown Green Bay for a suicide prevention walk.

## Out of the Darkness

### Be the Light Walk offers hope for suicide prevention

BY DANIEL KRAMER

participating in the walk

**TOYS**

from page 1

Brunner intended to deliver the birdhouses to the children at the daycare in time for them to give them to their mothers for Mothers Day gifts.

That gave him about two months to complete the project.

He admits that he was in over his head with the undertaking, but he achieved his goal and delivered the 50 birdhouses in time for them to be painted and customized by the youngsters before they were given to their moms.

Brunner said the experience gave him some much-needed perspective.

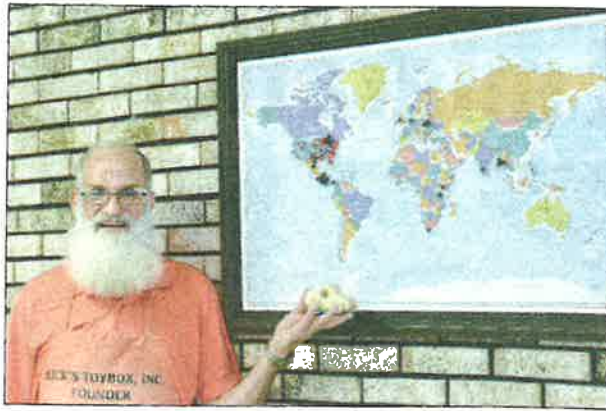
"These kids have a bigger challenge in their lives, and here I was having all sorts of pity for myself and my situation," he said. "They're young, they have a big future in front of them. They have bigger issues than I do. It kind of put me in a whole different mindset."

After a while, Brunner felt the need to move on from making birdhouses.

The projects had gone a long way to help him reclaim his health both mentally and physically, but he found that the birder community was too particular for his liking.

He said he wasn't too interested in making houses that catered to specific breeds of birds or ones that had ladders or fancy interior appointments.

He decided it was time to rebrand himself and play to his strengths: A



Rick Brunner, local artisan and philanthropist, shows off his most popular toy car design in front of a map of the world which marks everywhere he has delivered his handcrafted toys to children in need. **Josh Staloch Photo**

fondness for woodworking, children and toys.

That was seven or eight years ago, according to Brunner, and since then, he has delivered thousands of wooden toys, each hand crafted, to children in need here in the United States and around the world.

His most popular creation, a simple yet beautiful car, now comes with a lollipop and a four-pack of crayons rubber banded to the bottom so a child can customize the toy.

A toy made of wood might not seem like such a big deal to the average consumer, but Brunner pointed out that to some children, a simple toy to call their own can be an source of immense joy.

"I can't compete with the doodads and the shiny objects," he said. "But try to imagine being a child in a third world country and having to go to a doctor's appointment for something serious. You walk into the examining room and on the table is a toy,

just for you. It sets a different tone, takes away the coldness of the situation."

Currently, Brunner and his team of volunteers at Rick's Toybox are working on sending a batch of toys to Kenya, along with some hygiene products and clothing items donated to him by other 501(c)(3) organizations.

They have also been hard at work getting their toys to children in the Ukraine this year, and he said that hearing back from the missionaries and the doctors who get the toys into the hands of children in need makes it all worthwhile.

"It's a tear-jerker. It hits you right in the heart," Brunner said when asked what it feels like to hear that one of his toys has found a child who needs it and that child is enjoying it. "I'm really proud of what we've accomplished here."

To support Rick's Toybox Inc., head to [rickstoyboxinc.com](http://rickstoyboxinc.com).



**Packers outreach camp at Syble**

A young student from Syble Hopp School comes across Packers wideout Amari Rodgers back a few steps Tuesday. Packers assisted with the camp for students with special needs.



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