

Governor Phil Murphy

Press Pool Coverage: Governor Murphy Kicks Off Memorial Day Weekend at the Absecon Lighthouse

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ATLANTIC CITY — Gov. Phil Murphy climbed Absecon Lighthouse's 228 steps Friday morning to kick off Memorial Day weekend at the Jersey Shore, where he found the view fogged in and the wind somewhat fierce.

"I'm not great with heights," he said as he stepped out on the viewing platform briefly, got buffeted by gusts, and quickly came back inside.

Murphy chose to open the summer season here because he had heard of 94-year-old volunteer Lighthouse Keeper Buddy Grover, and wanted to meet him.

"I'm always with the team each year thinking, 'How do I kick the summer off?' This is a big day for us — for the state and for the Jersey Shore," Murphy said. "I said, 'I should go meet Buddy and climb the Absecon Lighthouse,' and that brought us to today."

Atlantic City Press meteorologist Joe Martucci is predicting the holiday weekend will be a "B" in his shore summer weekend weather report card. The shore's weather will get better as the weekend goes on, Martucci said, with Monday looking to be the best beach day.

Grover gave the governor a presentation on the lighthouse, which was built in 1857 and is New Jersey's tallest.

And he put in a pitch for the state-owned structure to get a little TLC. It needs \$3 million in work to fix a moisture problem, Grover said.

Barneget Lighthouse is now undergoing a renovation project to fix its water intrusion problems, Grover said. That sister lighthouse to Absecon is closed until October for the work, but the park arounds it remains open.

Grover also told Murphy about his family's history in New Jersey, which goes back to the 17th Century.

"You've heard of Grover's Mill ... in War of the Worlds?" Buddy asked of the town where Orson Wells had aliens land in his famous 1938 radio rendition of the H.G. Wells novel. "That's my family."

Grover's quick pace up the stairs was impressive.

"I'm having a tough time keeping up with Buddy," Murphy said.

Some visitors were surprised to see the governor at the top as they finished their climb.

"Oh, my gosh, that's the governor!" said Northfield resident Peter West, there with his 3-and-a-half-year-old grandson Landon McCloud. "I voted for you. I'd like to get a picture."

The two had their pictures taken with Murphy, as did two brothers visiting the resort from Washington, D.C.

"I used to work for the Democratic Party in South Carolina," said Jonathan Wang, 30, as he stepped up for his photo with Murphy.

His brother Justin Wang, 27, at first declined a photo, prompting the governor to joke, "So you must have worked for the Republican Party in South Carolina."

Justin changed his mind and posed with Murphy.

Grover volunteers twice a week, he said. That means he must climb the lighthouse to station himself at the top, where he talks about the history of the 165-year-old structure, how it went from kerosene to electric powered in 1925, and then was decommissioned in 1933 because newly built tall hotels in town were brighter and outshone the lighthouse.

He's been volunteering for 12.5 years, Grover said. He lives in an apartment complex just three blocks away.

Murphy said goodbye to Grover, who stayed at the top to greet more visitors, and headed for solid ground.

The governor said he would spend much of the weekend making appearances at veterans ceremonies, and spending time with family.

Michelle Brunetti-Post
The Press of Atlantic City

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