

Lighthouse provides a 'magical' setting for romance

By Chris McManus

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"Seven minutes to go," crackled the two-way radio in the tower of the Point Arena Lighthouse Saturday evening.

Marie Bose and Samantha LeVine of nearby Oz Farm hurried around arranging flowers, hanging a banner, putting the final touches on a charcuterie tray, setting up a speaker on a cell phone.

"Are we clear?" crackled the radio again. "Are we clear?"

"How do I answer?" LeVine asked, fumbling with the radio. Finally Bose took the radio. "We're clear," she said, and she and LeVine retreated down the spiral staircase to the balcony on the floor below.

Moments later, Gerald Olivas and Stefanie Snodgrass of Richmond entered the tower as a romantic song began to play. Olivas dropped to one knee in front of Snodgrass and began to read what he had written out and tried to memorize, before nerves got the better of him.

But when he said, "Stefanie Snodgrass, will you marry me?" her answer was a joyous, exuberant "Yes!" as she flung her arms around him.

The proposal wasn't a total surprise, Olivas said. The couple have been going together for eight years and were already talking about a November wedding at the Rockefeller Lodge in San Pablo. Snodgrass had said a simple proposal was all she needed, but Olivas wanted something memorable and magical, so he came up with the idea of proposing in the Lighthouse.

Mark Hancock, Executive Director of the Point Arena Lighthouse Keepers, said there have been other proposals in the tower and several weddings as well. "Before I got here, all

the weddings happened in the gazebo," Hancock said, "but since I've been here they've all been in the tower," although not by purposeful design.

Hancock said Olivas contacted him three to four weeks beforehand to plan the surprise proposal. "From a planning perspective, Marie [Bose, of Oz Farm] came up the week before, and we planned on how to keep it from being obvious," Hancock said.

Olivas and Snodgrass love the Gualala/Point Arena area and often come here on weekends.

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"We love getting away from the city," Olivas said. "We always love going to the beach." So they were familiar with both the Lighthouse and Oz Farm, where they stayed last weekend.

Bose said she has never really done catering before, "and definitely not at the top of a lighthouse," she became really excited about being part of the project as Olivas told her his plans, and agreed to do it.

She emailed him a menu, which he approved with few changes and then began what she called a "real whirlwind," although she got plenty of support from people on the farm.

On Saturday, Bose and LeVine arrived at the Lighthouse about 5 p.m., after the Lighthouse closed to the public and about a half hour before Olivas and Snodgrass were due to arrive. With help from Hancock, his two visiting grandchildren, Oliver and Fiona Abdu, and Chris McMa-

nus, the ICO reporter, they schlepped flowers, champagne, food, tea candles and table settings up the tower stairs.

To try to preserve the secret for as long as possible, Bose and LeVine set up most of the food, with warming dishes, out on the balcony on the back of the tower, so as not to be visible from the road. Then they set up the dinner table with all the romantic trimmings.

Meanwhile, Olivas, who sells point-of-sale systems, told his girlfriend he'd gotten a call from Hancock that he wanted to discuss perhaps replacing or upgrading the Lighthouse's credit card system, and the couple arrived while the preparations were still underway in the tower.

"Mark was stellar with his acting," Olivas said, as Hancock stalled the couple for a few minutes, then said he had a few chores to attend to before they could talk business and suggested they climb the tower and take a look around.

Bose and LeVine quickly hid outside on the balcony, but couldn't resist opening the door and sneaking out of their hiding place for the proposal. "We were down the stairs peeking up," Bose admitted. "We could see them."

After Snodgrass accepted Olivas' proposal, they danced and talked about their relationship

before settling down to their dinner of beet gazpacho, a harissa carrot salad on a bed of lentils, a whole roasted chicken with fingerling potatoes

and a plum galette.

"The rest of the evening was just magical," Olivas said Wednesday, when he was still, obviously, wrapped up

in the romance of the evening. "We'll be able to tell our grandchildren, I proposed to your grandmother at a lighthouse."



Gerald Olivas places the engagement ring on Stefanie Snodgrass' hand as he asks her to marry him Saturday evening. Chris McManus photo.



Marie Bose and Samantha LeVine finished decorating the table and setting out the champagne and charcuterie tray moments before Gerald Olivas and Stefanie Snodgrass climbed the stairs of the lighthouse tower in Point Arena. Chris McManus photo.

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