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News

Historic shanty, unique vacation rental lifted back into place at Michigan's Fishtown

Updated: 1:15 p.m. | Published: 1:15 p.m.




Fishtown's Otherside Shanty was lifted off its old foundation last year and recently returned to a higher, more solid perch. Photo provided by Amanda Holmes.

By [Tanda Gmitter | tgmitemer@mlive.com](mailto:tgmitemer@mlive.com)

LELAND, MI - Fishtown's historic Otherside Shanty got some help from a big crane and moving crew recently. It was lifted back into place - and onto its new foundation - after being pummeled by high water levels the last few years.

Now there's hope that this old storage shanty - its core dating back to the early 1900s - can resume its life next season as [a sought-after vacation rental](#) along the Leland River.

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The work to lift the Otherside and a few other shanties in Fishtown is part of a years-long project to save some of the endangered buildings in this tourist and shopping destination at the edge of Leland, where the river flows into Lake Michigan. Currently, [the Campaign for Fishtown](#) is about a million dollars shy of its \$5.2 million goal. It's more than a year into its hard-hat work schedule, with the popular Village Cheese Shanty and the old Morris Shanty now on new foundations after being lifted in 2020. This year, it was the Otherside Shanty's turn.



It took a big crane and lots of expertise to lift the Otherside Shanty back into place. Photo provided by Amanda Holmes.

“The Otherside’s new foundation piles were driven this past July, and will give the shanty a much sturdier and higher perch,” said Amanda Holmes, executive director of the [Fishtown Preservation Society](#), which has undertaken this ambitious project. “The hope is that the shanty can be rented out again for the 2022 summer. Some of the families who vacation there have returned each summer since the shanty was converted into a weekly rental.”

The Otherside Shanty was lifted off its old foundation in December of 2020. It had sustained extensive water damage, and had flooded several times that year when Lake Michigan and Leland River water levels peaked. “Water wicked up the walls into the insulation, destroying the ash flooring, and damaging the utilities,” Holmes said.

The recent lift project was overseen by Biggs Construction, Kasson Contracting and Team Elmer’s.



The Otherside Shanty had a date with a big crane to get it back in place. Photo provided by Amanda Holmes.

The Otherside Shanty is one of the pieces of Fishtown located along the south side of the Leland River. The current building includes part of an old Fishtown shanty dating back to 1904, when it was used by the area's commercial fishermen. Its name comes from its years as a storage building for the popular Carlson's fisheries operation, located on the north side of the river. If they needed something from that shanty, workers were sent to the "otherside" - or other side of the river - to collect the items.

About 20 years ago, the Carlsons began plans to convert the shanty into a vacation rental. It's drawn loyal vacationers ever since who love spending their down time as part of the Fishtown community.

Fishtown Preservation acquired The Otherside Shanty in 2016 and continued its weekly vacation rental use through the 2019 season, when water damage put it on the lift-and-repair list.

Returning the shanty to its place earlier this month was a big step in the Fishtown restoration project, Holmes said. "The shanties on the south side of the river have deep lots and are an important part in the future vision of Fishtown, which includes hands-on education and facilities for commercial fishing."



Workers on scene, helping the Otherside Shanty back in place. Photo provided by Amanda Holmes.

Tucked into its shoreline spot along the Leelanau Peninsula, Fishtown is unique in that it's a tourist draw as well as a working waterfront and home to commercial fishing - and a ferry that serves the nearby Manitou Islands.

Holmes said work will continue on the Morris and Otherside shanty sites, and the Carlson's Fishery building is next on the prep list. The well-known fishery building is slated to be lifted and its foundation redone later this year.

"Half of the projects now facing us were not on our radar before early 2019," says Holmes. "The water issues have made us focus on not just the Fishtown of next summer and five years from now, but the Fishtown of 50 years from now. All of the piling and foundation work is just one part of the difficult but hard-to-see work of saving Fishtown.

The work we are doing now will ensure that Fishtown will be here forever.”



Fishtown's Otherside Shanty was lifted off its old foundation last year and recently returned to a higher, more solid perch. Photo provided by Amanda Holmes.

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