



You Heard It Here First
City Club of Chicago



June 19, 2018

What's with the lighthouses on Michigan Avenue?



By LISA BERTAGNOLI |





First there were **cows**. Then **horses**, and then dogs. Now it's lighthouses.

Starting today and running through Aug. 11, 51 fanciful lighthouses will be on display along Michigan Avenue. They're an awareness-raising campaign from Chicago Lighthouse, a 112-year-old nonprofit that helps people who are blind and vision-impaired, veterans and all people with disabilities. The organization specifically hopes the lighthouses will encourage employers to hire people who are blind or visually impaired. The unemployment rate for that group is 70 percent, compared with a national rate of 3.9 percent. Plaques at each lighthouse will identify the artist and his or her sponsor and offer viewers information on blindness and disabilities. An audio tour will provide extra information. The displays will be accessible for people who are blind by an app, Aware, that provides audible wayfinding.

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The lighthouses are the work of 103 artists, 50 of whom are blind or disabled. Most are from the Chicago area and some participate in Project Onward, a workspace for professional artists with disabilities. Chicago Lighthouse paid artists a stipend for their work. Chicago artist Pooja Pittie designed her lighthouse to convey "the endless optimism and joy with which I paint," she writes in an email. Pittie, who's represented by the McCormick Gallery, has an incurable and progressive form of muscular dystrophy. Another lighthouse, "Sailing Chicago Harbor," is meant to evoke "warm weather, gentle breezes, full sails and carefree summer vacations," says its creator, Kansas City, Mo.-based **Jeff Hanson**, who is visually impaired. The lighthouses will be auctioned off as a fundraiser after their time on Michigan Avenue ends. Hanson's lighthouse already has a buyer: David Huber, a Chicago Lighthouse board member and CEO of Huber Financial Services in Lincolnshire, the presenting sponsor for the lighthouse display.

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Photo by Chicago Lighthouse

A rendering of Chicago artist Pooja Pittie's lighthouse, one of 51 to line Michigan Avenue beginning June 19.

Janet Szlyk, CEO at Chicago Lighthouse, got the idea last summer after seeing **statues of German shepherds** lining the Magnificent Mile. That display, a joint effort from animal shelter Paws Chicago, the Chicago Police Department and the Chicago Memorial Police Foundation, memorialized and raised funds for fallen Chicago police officers. "It was a great way to spread a message to a larger audience," Szlyk says. She expects the auction, plus donations prompted by the lighthouses, to raise \$250,000 to support Chicago Lighthouse's 39 programs.

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