

Cape May Star and Wave



159TH YEAR NO. 27 CAPE MAY, N.J. SERVING AMERICA'S NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK CITY WEDNESDAY, July 3, 2013 50¢



HOUSE OF THE WEEK

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Lower Township mayor, council blast dissolution notion

By CHRISTOPHER SOUTH
Cape May Star and Wave

LOWER TOWNSHIP – Lower Township Mayor Mike Beck said he wants to ask Cape May City Council if they really know what they are doing with their effort to pull out of the Lower Cape May Regional School District.

On Monday, Beck said he has watched and listened for the last year and a half as Cape May Councilman Jack Wichterman has led an effort to get Cape May out of the regional district. Wichterman has said the per student cost

is disproportionate, with Cape May spending an increasingly higher per student cost than the township.

Beck said he doesn't believe Cape May City Council has a true picture of the potential impact on the township if Cape May successfully withdraws from the district. Holding up a newspaper headline indicating a possible \$5.5 million increase in the tax burden on Lower Township should Cape May withdraw, Beck said the number would be more like \$10 million.

"This is huge. We want to send a clear message (to Cape

May City Council)," Beck said. "We will fight this, and fight this, and fight this."

"We will match them lawyer for lawyer," Beck said.

Beck said he has no quarrel with the residents of Cape May, but he questions the efforts by "a couple of their councilmen." He said he initially decided not get involved in another municipality's matter, hoping it was like a cold that would eventually go away.

"I never said anything, not wanting to play ping pong with them," Beck said, "but we are the people who are

going to have to pay for this."

Beck said he has read reports over the last 18 months saying Cape May taxpayers are being charged \$41,000 per student, then \$72,000 per student, then \$80,000 and now \$101,000 per student sent to the regional school district. Beck said an analogy is someone buying a \$450 season pass for the waterpark; then after using it just one time, claiming the waterpark charged them \$450 for one visit.

According to Beck, the district isn't charging Cape May any more, but the per student

cost is higher because there are fewer students coming out of Cape May.

"In 1971, Cape May had 250 students in the regional district, and Lower Township had 821. Since that time we have had about a 75 percent increase to about 1,400. At the same time, they have had about a 75 percent decrease. They now have about 65 students. They are not using the waterslide," he said.

"The Pied Piper came, increased their property values, and took the kids away," Beck said.

Beck said with the aver-

age home value of around \$600,000 in Cape May, families with children are no longer setting up household within the city. Beck said two-thirds of Cape May property owners are now second homeowners and out-of-town residents.

Township resident Steve Sheftz, who has researched the funding issue, said the population at the end of 2010 was the same as it was in 1950. He said Cape May's population in 1950 was 3,607 and Lower Township's popu-

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Independence Day events around the lower cape area

Independence Day can be a big deal in many places around the country, but none more so than in South Jersey, where the Fourth of July is a fun, patriotic holiday.

Lower Township

The annual Independence Day Celebration starts a day early in Lower Township, beginning with a big bang along the bay front.

Four live bands, food items from ice cream to crab cakes and amusement rides are all a part of Lower Township's Independence Day Festival, Wednesday, July 3, beginning at 5 p.m.

The annual celebration sponsored by the Lower Township Department of Parks and Recreation, takes place along Bay Drive in Lincoln Avenue in North Cape May to Browning Avenue in Town Bank.

A variety of food items will be available from 65 vendors, including everything from caramel corn to steak.

There will be inflatable games including football and a pitching machine. Two areas off Bay Drive will have amusement rides for children available for a nominal fee.

The four live bands include "M80," a 80s tribute band, "Thirsty Wilson," a six-piece rock band, "Back to Life," a pop/rock trio

and the Trilby String Band, which will march along Bay Drive and stage a performance in front of Harpoon Henry's restaurant.

A 30-minute fireworks show will be launched from an offshore barge at 9 p.m.

Bay Drive will be closed from Pinewood Avenue to Lincoln Boulevard from 4 to 10:30 p.m. A section of Bay Drive from Town Bank Road to Lincoln will close at 2 p.m.

Rain date for the event is July 5. For additional information call (609) 886-2005, ext. 9.

The Wildwoods

Independence Day starts early in the Wildwoods with an Independence Day Parade and Patriotic Pooch Parade in North Wildwood. Check in from 8 to 8:45 a.m. at 9th and Atlantic Avenues. The parade begins there at 9 a.m. and proceeds north to 1st and Surf Avenue. Prizes for the best decorated bikes in red, white and blue theme. The Patriotic Pooch Parade joins the Independence Day Parade through the island at 8th and Atlantic avenues. Dogs will parade alongside decorated bicycles. Prizes for the best dressed pooches. To register for either event call (609) 522-2955.

From 9 to 11 a.m. there

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Cain Chamberlin/Cape May Star and Wave

Above, a view of St. Mary's Retreat Center in Cape May Point as viewed from the Cape May Point Lighthouse.

1859 Lighthouse a symbol of Cape Island

By CAIN CHAMBERLIN
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT – It's become an iconic symbol of Cape Island, but for those who were adrift at sea fortunate enough to be within the realm of its beam, the Cape May Lighthouse was a sign of refuge – a savior.

Built in 1859, the 157-foot tall lighthouse is still used as a navigational beacon today, shining its light 24 miles out to sea every 15 seconds. The U.S. Coast Guard is responsible for operating and maintaining the modern light known as a DCB-224, which was installed in 2002.

"I think that's the most interesting part. With all the modern technology like GPS and radar on boats and ships, they still use the traditional, old-fashioned lighthouses," said Susan Krysiak, communications coordinator for the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts and Humanities (MAC).

Krysiak said this year marks the 25th anniversary

of MAC opening the lighthouse to the public. She said in the Coast Guard leased the lighthouse to MAC in 1986, which led to its full restoration, maintenance and operation as a museum. By 1988, MAC had undertaken safety improvements necessary to allow the public to explore the lighthouse. Krysiak said in the early 90s, ownership of the structure was transferred from the Coast Guard to the state so historic preservation funding could be acquired. In the last 24 years, close to \$2 million has been spent in order to allow visitors to climb the 199-step spiral staircase safely to the top.

Tony LaSalle, one of the lighthouse managers, said the Cape May Lighthouse welcomes approximately 70,000 visitors annually.

LaSalle said the Cape May Lighthouse is the third documented lighthouse in Cape May Point. The first known structure was built in 1823, although there is evidence

of a beacon being present since the late 18th century. According to MAC research, the location of the 1823 lighthouse is now underwater due to erosion. Krysiak said the second lighthouse, built in 1847, was a poorly constructed 78-foot tower. In 1857, the Army Corps of Engineers began building the present tower, equipped with a Fresnel lens, at a cost of \$40,000.

According to the New Jersey Lighthouse Society, the first-order Fresnel Lens had 16 flash panels with oil wick lamps beneath, producing a white flash every 30 seconds. In 1902, the lamps were replaced with an incandescent oil vapor apparatus. The same year, the lighthouse keeper's dwellings were enlarged to provide more space for the family. In 1933, a 250-watt electric bulb was installed. When it was automated in 1936, the need for a permanent lighthouse keeper was eliminated.

Gerry Benjes, who has been a guide or "translator" for the lighthouse since MAC opened it to the public, said it was lit for the first time on Halloween in 1859 and could be seen up to 19 miles away.

Those who climb the tower often find Benjes waiting at the top ready for questions and comments about the lighthouse, which she knows like the back of her hand after serving at the lighthouse for a quarter of a century. Benjes shares stories and personal lighthouse experiences of with guests to enhance the experience. One of her fondest memories was a young man who planned on proposing to his girlfriend over 150 feet in the air overlooking Cape Island and the Atlantic Ocean at sunset.

Benjes said she agreed to help the gentlemen with his romantic gesture. She told him to stand out on the lighthouse platform while his

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