

Face

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drugs was during a trip to the Poconos when it was discovered someone brought marijuana. She described later behavior as Greg being "nasty" to her. DiAntonio said she and her ex-husband became aware there was a drug problem and got him into counseling.

"He said all the right things in counseling. And till he died he had never been bad when he was sober," she said.

However, DiAntonio said addiction is a demon that lives inside a person and never goes away. He got a soccer scholarship to LaSalle and ended up quitting the team. He left and went to Cabrini College where he joined the tennis team, but soon quit that as well. DiAntonio talked about years of going in and out of drug rehabilitation programs and halfway houses, only to lapse back into drug use. She said in some of the halfway houses the operators are selling drugs to the residents.

DiAntonio said Greg was functional for most of the time while using drugs. With the help of his father, he started his own construction company and was build-

ing up a good reputation as a builder. He married and seemed to have a good marriage. His wife, Evelyn, had to inform the DiAntonios that Greg was still using and was again going into drug rehab.

Three days before their 10th wedding anniversary, Greg died from a drug overdose.

DiAntonio said part of the problem with addiction is most addicts feel like they have some control. In one of his last rehabilitation efforts, Greg decided to skip the aftercare, insisting he knew what to do. His last communication to his mother was a text message in which he said, "Have some damn faith, Mom, I can beat it, I'll be fine."

About four hours later he was dead from an overdose.

DiAntonio repeated the notion that addictions are a disease that the addict cannot control, and not as a moral weakness.

"It needs to be treated as a disease the same way cancer is," DiAntonio said, eliciting applause from the audience.

The audience showed the same reaction when speakers mentioned the need for a long term, comprehensive treatment center. DiAntonio called a 30-day drug rehab program a joke. Most of the



Christopher South/Cape May Star and Wave

Above, Freeholder Kristine Gabor called for the county's forum on drug addiction. Gabor oversees the county Health and Human Services.

programs Greg was involved with lasted just 45 days, with a halfway house aftercare program. Some audience members suggest long-term

programs of 18 or 24 months are needed.

Cass Foster, one of the founding members of a group called Parent to Parent, said

she was in denial after her son's fatal drug overdose at 27.

"I used to think, maybe he didn't die," she said.

She said she put a picture of her son Chris in the kitchen, wanting to see his face as if he were still around. She would walk in to find that her husband had laid the picture face down on the counter, because he was unable to look at his son's face. At some point her husband told her they had to agree not to blame the other for their son's death.

Afterward, Foster located another woman whose child had died from an overdose, and then their were four mothers. They started to lobby Gov. Christine Todd Whitman for treatment centers for drug addiction, which led to the South Jersey Initiative, which was a funding source to get help to people who need it.

Foster said she has worked to form various groups - support groups, grieving groups, etc., but there needs to be treatment centers to combat the addiction problem.

"Everybody in the room is here for a reason," Foster told the audience. "Something needs to be done. My advice is we have to become one voice...there has to be a pub-

lic outcry."

Gabor said statistics show there is a heroin/opiate problem in Cape May County, and education and law enforcement are two parts of the solution.

"We have to try to stop it before it happens. When you hear people who have addictive behavior, you want to teach them don't event attempt to do it. You want them to never try it to begin with," she said.

Gabor said speakers indicated heroin use was in every neighborhood, everywhere, in every economic status.

"It's not someone hiding in a corner in an inner city, it is here in your back yard, and it is affecting me as a person in this community," she said.

Gabor said she wanted to look legislatively at what are we not offering and how citizens are hitting roadblocks when they are trying to get rid of a drug problem, and to get these people what they need. She said she would be working with the freeholders and others to try and figure out the next step. In the meantime, she would like to keep the conversation going.

Talk

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also experienced vacancies, she said.

"It was widespread. It was across the board. I think it was the high-end as well as

budget properties. I just think it was felt throughout the entire county and throughout every segment of our tourism industry," Clark said.

Cape May County's fair showing is related to visi-

tors tightening their belts and spending money frugally while on vacation than in the past, Wieland said.

"When we talk about the perfect storm, it has little to do with Sandy. It has more to do with the economy. This is changing people's spending habits. Their vacation habits are changing," Wieland said.

She said more people are opting to pay down debt instead of paying for vacations on their credit cards, and essentially trading off luxury for affordability.

"This seems to be the new normal for vacations and tourism," Wieland said. "We're seeing it nationally and glob-

ally. People are changing their spending habits. While people think they have a right to have a vacation, people are not spending as they had."

Ups and Downs

People came to Cape May County to find value for their vacations, Wieland said. In the 300-mile radius of Cape May County live 30 million people who are eschewing an exotic getaway for closer shore attractions, she said.

According to Wieland, the shore communities have to look for ways to entice more people to their resorts.

Last year, Cape May

County's tourism expenditures increased 3.6 percent. Wieland said future spending increases seem unlikely.

"I think we're going to see a decrease in spending. That's not just Cape May County, but the whole eastern seaboard. They also saw the same trend," Wieland said.

Rental properties have rented "very well" this summer in Cape May County, Wieland said, with renters preferring to rent for a week instead of a few nights.

"The longer people stay, the better that is for the mid-week slump. These are people who are going to be spending money at attractions and

hopefully in restaurants," Wieland said.

In historic Cape May, beach tag sales increased this summer, a "promising indicator" than what was heard from business community that business was down, according to Wieland.

Ocean City saw beach tag revenues decline this summer by \$117,493, or 3.49 percent, according to a July 31 revenue update.

In 2012, Cape May County ranked second among New Jersey counties in generating vacationers, about 12.4 million, behind Atlantic County. Of that 12.4 million, 6.3 million were day-trippers, while 6.1 million were overnight guests.

"Certainly the overnights increase the occupancy tax which we get funding for marketing, so we're very careful to create more overnights, but we'll take people. We need people to keep our economy going," Wieland said.

The Canadian Factor

Canadian tourists stay longer in Cape May County than non-Canadians, about seven to 10 days.

Second and third generation Canadian tourists are looking past the campgrounds and finding rental accommodations to lengthen their stays, Wieland said.

She said while Canadians preferred campgrounds and Wildwood motels, they're exploring other options in Cape May County.

"They've become a little more savvy in being renters, so they bring families and they rent a house or condo, so it's not just campgrounds or hotels in Wildwood. It's spreading them out throughout the county," Wieland said.

Please see Talk page A9

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