



Is my name in the paper? Lower Township sale slated

By CHRISTOPHER SOUTH
Cape May Star and Wave

LOWER TOWNSHIP – Imagine a scenario where a friend calls and says, “Hey, I saw your name in the paper.” That could provoke feelings ranging from being flattered to frightened out of your wits. This week, Lower Township is posting its annual tax sale list, which has 509 accounts with delinquencies from 2011. According to Lower Township Tax Collector Susan Jackson, making the tax sale list should be anything but a surprise. “I’ve sent late notices, two tax sale notices and three

more notices in the mail,” she said, “and the list will be in the newspaper for two weeks and posted in five public places.” Jackson said the state allows Lower Township to hold a tax sale after Nov. 10 each year because the township is on a calendar year. Wildwood, she said, holds its tax sale in December and Middle Township in January. She said there are a couple theories on when Lower Township’s tax sale should be held. One is to hold it in the spring before the current year’s taxes start being added to the bill. The other is to wait until after summer because



The tax collector cometh – tax sale scheduled for April 23.

people who work seasonally are in a better position to pay. Jackson prefers the former because the amount owned is less. Lower Township’s tax sale

is scheduled for April 23. The term “tax sale” is a bit of a misnomer, because it includes more than taxes. “Anything not paid for the calendar year is subject to tax sale,” Jackson said, “taxes, water, sewer, anything else... cleanup, water connection fees...the connection fee is lien-able. Even if you don’t hook up, you’re still liable for the connection fee.” What can happen if your unpaid taxes or other charges go to a tax sale is people bid on paying your charges. “They are bidding on an interest rate,” Jackson said. According to Jackson, anyone can participate in the tax

sale, but more and more it’s companies. She said a company could pick up your debt and have a lien against your property. While they hold the lien they can earn 18 percent on the principal. Jackson said if the lien is not paid off in two years the lien holder can foreclose. Jackson said the lien holder has no rights to your property. “When they pay back (the lien holder) you are paid back at 18 percent plus other costs,” she said. Jackson said the there is not much risk for the lien holder.

Please see Sale, page A2

Cape May budget passed with 1.1-cent tax increase

By CAIN CHAMBERLIN
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY – Cape May City Council adopted the city’s 2012 budget with 1.1-cent tax increase, meaning the owner of a \$500,000 home in Cape May will see a \$55 increase in their property tax for 2012. The tax rate is 29.4 cents per \$100 of assessed property value, which is an increase from the 28.3 cents last year. There will be approximately \$8.2 million raised by local purpose taxes. The budget is \$749,732 under the state levy cap. At the March 20 regular meeting, former mayor and councilman Jerry Gaffney said he would prefer a zero tax increase, given the rough economic times and the number of residents on a fixed income. He asked Municipal Auditor Leon Costello how much one-penny equaled in the budget. Costello said a penny on the tax rate equated to \$280,000. Gaffney said that amount of money would need to be trimmed from the budget or

would need to be raised in revenue to offset the 1.1-cent tax increase. He referred to the city’s surplus budget, saying Cape May had \$3,256,210 in its surplus account at the end of 2011. The city plans to use \$2,050,000 of its surplus in 2012, leaving around \$1.2 million in reserve. He asked City Manager Bruce MacLeod why the city was leaving 37 percent of the surplus in reserve, when Cape May left around \$970,000 in reserve last year. MacLeod said in the past, the city has used in the range of 60 to 80 percent of surplus in the annual budget, so using 63 percent in 2012 was not out of the ordinary. MacLeod also noted the city is expecting to sell two bonds in the open market within the next two years and a strong surplus is anticipated from them. Gaffney also asked why he did not see the debt service in the budget for the new Convention Hall. Costello said payments on the new facility debt begin in 2014.

‘We don’t expect any impact at all from Convention Hall because we are going to replace old debt with the Convention Hall debt.’

– Municipal Auditor Leon Costello

Please see Budget, page A2



Above, Congressman Frank LoBiondo (far left in photo) took part in a ribbon cutting ceremony March 23 at the U.S. Coast Guard Training Center-Cape May for the new multi-mission building.

Multi-mission building opened

By CAIN CHAMBERLIN
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY – A ribbon cutting ceremony March 23 marked the official opening of an \$11.4 million multi-mission building at the U.S. Coast Guard Training Center Cape May. The ground breaking for the 29,400 square-foot facility was held Sept. 27, 2010, the 68th anniversary of Douglas Munro’s death. Munro is the only Congressional Medal of Honor recipient in the Coast Guard. The multi-mission building was built to replace a 65-year-old U.S. Army building across the street that

originally served as a laundry facility and was converted to a Coast Guard station. The Army, Navy and the Coast Guard have used the base since its inception. Capt. William Kelly, commander of Training Center (TRACEN) Cape May said the original station served well but it was certainly time for an upgrade. He said the new station signifies the first impression to the 40,000 visitors who come to the Coast Guard base each year. “This is the building their sons and daughters work in, so it’s great to have a new, quality station to show them,” he said. Capt. Meredith Austin, com-

mander of the Coast Guard Sector Delaware Bay, said the new station will serve homeland security functions by housing the Vessel Board Search team that observes marine traffic entering the Delaware Bay area. She said this includes many foreign ships, which are supposed to give 96 hours notice before arriving. She said this was done in Philadelphia, prior to the new Cape May Station. Boarding teams meet the ships in Lewes, Del., and can now look forward to shorter trips since Cape May is much closer to the bay entrance than Philadelphia.

Please see USCG, page A2

Auditor: CRDA funding is there

By CAIN CHAMBERLIN
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY – Municipal Auditor Leon Costello said the \$1.5 million from the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) promised to the city of Cape May for the new Convention Hall construction will still be received. That was Costello’s answer to former city mayor and councilman Jerry Gaffney at the March 20 regular meeting, when Gaffney asked if the funding was on its way or in the bank. Gaffney said he read multiple newspaper articles about Atlantic City receiving more and more CRDA funding, while he heard nothing of the Cape May funding. Costello said he recently spoke with the CRDA Chief Financial Officer. “He said all the Cape May money was still there,” Costello said. Gaffney asked if the money was in a city account. Costello said there are still more forms that need to be filed before the money is in the city’s possession. City Manager Bruce MacLeod said he had a tall stack of papers on his desk that were

Please see CRDA, page A2

Councilman takes tax fight to state

By CAIN CHAMBERLIN
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY – Deputy Mayor Jack Wichterman is heading to Trenton to continue the fight to lower taxes for Cape May residents to send students to the Lower Cape May Regional School District. Wichterman said at the March 20 regular meeting, he would be meeting with the Deputy Chief of Staff Deborah Gramiccioni and the acting Commissioner of the Department of Education Chris Cerf on March 30. Wichterman recently sent a letter to Gov. Chris Christie to arrange the meeting. He said Cape May residents are currently paying over \$70,000 per student sent to the district. Wichterman said he and council would see what they could do to bring school tax relief to Cape May.

“We want to pay our fair share but we feel that \$70,000 or \$72,000 per pupil is out of the realm of fair share,” he said. In January, Lower Cape May Regional School District Business Administrator and Board Secretary Frank Ornato told the Star and Wave there are 85 students from Cape May this school year and the city is paying the district \$6,126,304, which averages out to \$72,074 per student. He said the current student population is mostly Lower Township children (1,461). Lower Township is paying \$11,328,507 in taxes this year, making its cost \$7,753 per student. The current formula used by the district is based on property value and enrollment, and since Cape May property values are generally higher than Lower Township,

Cape May property owners pay more in school tax. Wichterman said there are six alternative funding formulas that could be used, however, changing the funding formula requires a vote among the participating municipalities to change it. Wichterman said a vote would not result in a change because there are more voters in Lower Township and they don’t want to pay more taxes. Lower Township has approximately 14,700 voters while Cape May has a little over 1,600. “We know they’re not going to touch it because there’s more voters in Lower Township than there are in Cape May or West Cape May,” Cape May Taxpayer’s Association member Peter Iurato said during public

Please see State, page A2

O’Neill family, others waited out the 1962 Ash Wednesday storm

By CHRISTOPHER SOUTH
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY – Russell O’Neill was born the first of the Russell kids growing up on Pearl Street in West Cape May. He attended West Cape May Elementary School, and later Lower Cape May Regional High School. In 1962 the school only had three wings. One of them was for grade 7 and 8. Another had the gym and industrial arts, and another was all classrooms. Russell was 15 in 1962, and on the morning of April 6 he and the four oldest O’Neill children went to school like it was any other day. Only

Michael, who was just three-years old at the time, stayed home. No one knew there was a northeast storm brewing – a storm that would change the Cape May beachfront forever. “Nobody knew. They had no idea. We went to school on the 6th. It was windy and raining, and there was some water laying on Third Avenue and the buses couldn’t get by...but nobody knew any more than that,” he said. O’Neill said they could tell the water wasn’t from high tide – it was just lying there. He said after dinner he and his sister Frances, 12, and brother Stephen, 9, took a walk. His brother Kevin was 6, but did not accom-

pany them. At the time there was about two inches of water from wind and rain in their yard. “A little after 7 p.m. the water started rising. A little after 8 p.m. there was two foot of water in the yard,” O’Neill said. Cape Island Creek was backing up, and O’Neill’s father knew the water was not going to stop rising soon, so he took off his shoes and socks, rolled up his pant legs and went downstairs and took the electric motor off the furnace to save it. He had just replaced the motor six months before. The O’Neills spent the night in their home, but in



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