



Photo by Claire Verna

Point perspective

CAPE MAY POINT – A visitor to the Cape May area for nearly two decades, Claire Verna submitted the above photo from Cape May Point. Verna was recently in Cape May celebrating her 50th wedding anniversary. See more of Verna's photos on page A10.

West Cape May: Do you get what you are paying for in property taxes?

By CAIN CHAMBERLIN
Cape May Star and Wave

WEST CAPE MAY – Each Monday, a group of professionals meet at Borough Hall to assess and oversee finances in the hopes of alleviating the tax rate and expenses in West Cape May.

These part time employees in the finance office – Tax Assessor Arthur Amonette, Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Frank Donato, Deputy CFO Doris Hartman and Tax Collector Todd Burkey, work for other municipalities in the county as well. Mayor Pam Kaithern, the borough's Director of Revenue and Finance, also attends the

Monday meetings. Kaithern said having the financial officers meet on a regular basis is a significant benefit to West Cape May residents.

of thousands of dollars," Kaithern said. By the end of 2012, West Cape May citizens will pay \$5,160,236.41 in property

tax, district school tax and regional school tax. Donato said the school taxes make up the majority of the overall tax rate. West Cape May residents are paying \$858,618 to the local district school in 2012 and \$1,602,521.45 in regional school taxes.

People often pay their taxes in concurrence with their mortgage. According to Donato, the borough has had a tax collection rate of between 95 and 96 percent over the last three years, which is a strong collection rate. "It's increased over the past couple years," Donato said.

'By having these licensed professionals...in here on a part time basis we save tens of thousands of dollars.'

– WCM Mayor Pam Kaithern

"By having these licensed professionals, at the top of their field, in here on a part-time basis, we save tens

taxes, with only \$1,553,948.58 going to the borough. The remainder is paid to the county general-purpose tax, coun-

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Pledge 2 Fledge Campaign kicked off at state park

By CAIN CHAMBERLIN
Cape May Star and Wave

LOWER TOWNSHIP – It was a passionate interest in birding that brought Richard Crossley to Cape May from Yorkshire, England, 22 years ago and now the avid birder is reaching out to people of all ages to spark their interest in the hobby as well.

On Thursday, Aug. 23, Richard and his wife, Debra, organized the first Pledge 2 Fledge (P2F) Campaign event at Cape May Point State Park. The park was the kick-off event used for an international initiative that was promoted in at least 40 countries from Thursday to Sunday.

Richard said he has used social media outlets like Facebook and YouTube to build an alliance of birders, educators, and nature enthusiasts across six continents who mobilize friends and non-birders to experience the thrill of observing and identifying birds in nature.

"It's a grassroots movement to popularize bird watching," Richard said. "We have events going on in China, India, Brazil, South Korea – everywhere. We were pleasantly surprised how well it



Cain Chamberlin/Cape May Star and Wave

Above, Erin Kiefer holds a great horned owl as she speaks to visitors at the first annual Pledge 2 Fledge event held at Cape May Point Lighthouse State Park. Right, P2F organizers Debra and Richard Crossley with their daughters, Sophia and Sam. See more photos on page A10.

has taken off."

The goal of the initial event at Cape May Point State Park was to draw a crowd of people who would normally never think of spending their day birding and show them how intriguing the activity can be. Richard said the Cape May area is the perfect place to host the first event considering it is well-known

for its diverse population of migrating birds and other wildlife.

"The key is to influence people," he said. "If we can get just two, three or four of these kids or adults to look at birding differently and see how much fun they can have doing it, then to me that's a huge success."

Richard and Debra have



gotten their daughters, Sophia and Sam, turned-on to birding as well while traveling around the world to places like Egypt to see all sorts of winged creatures. The two girls both attended the event to help their parents spread the word about Pledge 2 Fledge.

Richard is the co-founder of P2F, as well as an internationally acclaimed birder, award-winning author, pho-

tographer and youth birding advocate. Having a close relationship with many of the South Jersey nature groups, Richard invited 12 organizations that set up stations at the event such as the Cape May Nature Center, the Wetlands Institute, The Nature Conservancy, Citizens United and more.

"It's a great opportunity for everyone to increase membership in their organization and make a difference," Richard said.

One of the more popular stations was that of the Woodford Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge located in Medford, Burlington County. Refuge staff members and bird experts, Erin Kiefer and Becca Gutwirth, took questions about the native raptors they brought along with them, such as the great horned owl, short-eared owl, red-tailed hawk and the smallest of the falcons, the kestrel. Each of the raptors was injured one way or another and are all being rehabilitated at the refuge.

Birds were not the only focus of the event, however, as guests were also able to visit various stations related to photography, butterfly studies and marine life

touch-tanks. There was a bingo game held to determine the winner of new binoculars and the Cape May Lighthouse was free to children in order to attract them to the event and perhaps see some birds while they were up there.

Dave Maggiong, a co-founder of P2F, said they also set up a "Red Carpet Hall of Fame," where guests could video record themselves and send a message to those at other P2F events around the world. Maggiong said the videos were posted on Facebook, YouTube and the website www.globalbirdinginitiative.org. He said he was thrilled to see the number of people who attended the Thursday kick-off event.

"It's wonderful to see so many people come out," Maggiong said. "The core of it is to get people to bring their own friends out and just open up people's hearts and mind to what's around them."

Following the event at the park, Richard organized events with the Birding By Boat and Wetlands Wildlife Safari throughout the weekend and a Sunday event at the Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge.

Council votes 3-2 to permit increased lot coverage on Cape May Avenue

By CAIN CHAMBERLIN
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY – At last week's city council meeting, Cape May City Council voted 3-2 to increase maximum permitted lot coverage from 30 to 40 percent on Cape May Avenue.

Mayor Ed Mahaney, Councilwomen Terri Swain and Deanna Fiocca voted in favor of the increasing lot coverage in this R-1 zoning district, while Councilman

William Murray and Deputy Mayor Jack Wichterman opposed making the change in just one R-1 zone.

The meeting drew numerous Cape May Avenue residents, who supported the increase in permitted lot coverage, as well as residents from surrounding streets, such as Idaho, Ohio and Philadelphia Avenues, who didn't feel the alteration should be adopted.

Cape May Avenue homeowners argued the R-1 zone

has the strictest requirements of any other zone in the city, but their street is distinctive in that it is a wide street divided by a green center island owned by the city, which adds open space to the neighborhood.

Planning Board Engineer Craig Hurlless noted the R-1 zone has a minimum lot size of 9,375 square feet and 2,812 square feet in coverage allowed for a house, garage, driveway, swimming pool and

other improvements.

Hurlless agreed Cape May Avenue was unique because it has two separate right-of-ways. He said the increase was also deemed consistent with the city's Master Plan by the Planning Board.

Although the decision was made by the Planning Board, Murray said there seemed to be an "inherent unfairness" in the matter. He believed if one section of the R-1 zone was increased, the rest of the

residential lots in the district should be as well. Murray said he would prefer if the proposal were revisited to include all the homes in the R-1 zone. Wichterman said he also felt it was wrong to pick just Cape May Avenue out of the R-1 zone.

"I think spot zoning is a terrible idea," Wichterman said.

The deputy mayor said increasing lot coverage could potentially lead to a tax increase for those on that par-

tical street because properties would be more valuable. Wichterman said there is also a problem with standing water on certain properties on Cape May Avenue and surrounding streets, though the city was making improvements to prevent water from pooling in the street. He said allowing an increase in lot coverage could make the issue of water flow even worse.

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Lingering thunderstorms drench the cape area over weekend

By CHRISTOPHER SOUTH
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY – Thunderstorms lingered over the Cape May area Saturday in an uncommon display of sound and fury.

According to meteorologist Mitchell Gaines of the National Weather Service, Mount Holly, the storms

were not being pushed along like other systems.

"We've had that the last couple of days...a different location every day," Gaines said on Monday.

Gaines described the storms as a vast, very persistent band of storms ranging from Sussex County, Del., to Cape May. A flash flood warning was issued

for East Central Sussex County around mid-afternoon Saturday. The thunderstorms began in the late evening and lasted into the early morning hours.

"There was a four to six hour window of heavy thunderstorms," Gaines said. Gaines said the storm sys-

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Couple fined for cutting dune trees

By CHRISTOPHER SOUTH
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY – A Monroeville couple were ordered to pay restitution after they pleaded guilty, Aug. 22, to charges related to the cutting of trees on the Second Avenue dune.

According to the incident filed on March 2 by Officer Kelly Walsh of the Cape May Police Department, a witness called the police and reported what appeared to be someone cutting trees in the dunes.



Dune vegetation at Second Avenue.

The officer's report indicated that on March 2 at around 12:46, a witness saw trees

shaking and heard a sawing Please see Trees, page A2

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