

COVID cases rise nine-fold since August

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House of the week

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Murphy: No intention for state shutdown

Governor suspends indoor youth, adult sports, lowers limits on inside gatherings

By DAVID NAHAN
Cape May Star and Wave

TRENTON — Responding to rumors about returning to a statewide shutdown, Gov. Phil Murphy said they are just that — rumors.

During his Monday afternoon COVID-19 press conference, the governor did add some new restrictions — limits on outdoor gatherings and stopping all youth and adult sports from Dec. 5 to Jan. 2 — but he said

“those rumors ... are just that — rumors.

“Just because we say that all options are on the table ... that does not mean we are about to exercise any of those options,” Murphy said. “We have made it clear over the past weeks we are not in the same situation we found ourselves in during the spring when the state had to take dramatic actions to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and save lives.”

Instead of having to issue

sweeping orders, the state has more moves that it can take to limit the spread of COVID-19.

“We are no less committed or steadfast ... but we now have the ability to be more focused and surgical. We have much better data and science to draw from now than we did eight months ago,” he said.

Asked if he was considering closing schools to in-person learning, Murphy said the state does have that option but he does not see that happening

and that schools have been one of the safer settings during the coronavirus pandemic.

Because of better understanding of the virus and other factors, the state can put restrictions on the activities that have proven to have the greatest risk of transmission, he said, adding, “Our overarching aim is the stability of the state’s health system and ensure care for everyone who needs it.”

The state took the broad steps in the spring because factors

pointed toward overload at the hospitals and the potential collapse of the state’s health care system. “The cliff we were standing on was frightening,” he said about the time, noting there were also shortages of critical supplies and lack of knowledge about the virus.

Those have all been addressed and the state is on a much better footing, the governor asserted.

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David Nahan/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Santa Claus came to town

Santa was making his rounds in Lower Township on Black Friday. He was keeping his reindeer in the barn, letting them rest up for Christmas Eve, instead getting a ride around the township courtesy of the Erma Volunteer Fire Department.

Late-arriving monarchs a mystery to naturalists

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT — Monarch butterflies were still arriving in the borough in late November, something that could cost them their lives due to a shortage of blooming flowers to fuel their flight across Delaware Bay and onto their wintering site 2,000 miles away in Mexico.

Monarch butterflies conclude their migration for the most part in late October but this year they have continued to arrive after a hard freeze. Mark Garland, director of New Jersey Audubon’s Monarch Monitoring Project, said in the 20 years he has been involved with the project he has not seen so many monarchs in November.

Louise Zematis, associate naturalist at Cape May Bird Observatory, saw one or two monarchs flying by every minute near a dune in Cape May Point last week, he said.

“They keep showing up until there is a real hard freeze and it is unlikely that any of these late ones are going to make it down to Mexico, but we really don’t know,” he said.

A lack of food is an issue with the monarchs feeding



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Mark Garland of the New Jersey Audubon’s Monarch Monitoring Project said the butterflies continue to show up in Cape May Point despite the lateness of the season.

on nectar, Garland said. A freeze two weeks ago killed most flowers in Cape May Point.

He said most of the native flowering plants are finished for the year.

“It’s a long way to go without any food,” he said. “If they can make it across to Delaware and head south, whether they are going to find any nectar along the migratory route is a big question,” Garland said.

Monarchs were tagged well into November, he said.

“If one of them is found anywhere else it’s going to be interesting information for us,” Garland said. “If one of them makes it all the way to Mexico, we’ll be very surprised but delighted.”

Another hazard for the monarchs would be encountering freezing

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Lower Cape May Regional goes to all-virtual learning schedule

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

ERMA — Lower Cape May Regional School District moved to all-virtual learning Dec. 1.

In a letter to the public, Superintendent Joseph Castellucci stated due to recent increases of COVID-19 cases and exposures in the community and “our schools, we are taking the necessary precautions to prevent the spread of illness.”

“The district will remain closed for in-person instruction through at least Dec. 15. We will monitor the impact that this virus is having on our community and provide

an update on Dec. 14 to our families regarding the re-opening or extended closure of our schools for in-person instruction,” Castellucci stated. “The basis for this very difficult decision was the continuing rise in COVID-19 cases in our region and the staffing shortages in our district due to quarantines, which have created obstacles in our ability to maintain our current hybrid mode of instruction.”

Castellucci stated instruction will be a combination of virtual, synchronous lessons and remote, asynchronous work five days per week. Each school’s remote learning schedule is posted on

the district website, as is other useful information and resources, including a “Tech Hotline” to assist with any connectivity or Chromebook issues.

According to the district’s website, as of Nov. 30, three high school students tested positive for COVID-19 and 59 students have been quarantined. No staff members have tested positive but six have been quarantined.

At the Richard M. Teitelman School, no students tested positive for COVID-19 and 12 students quarantined. No staff members tested positive for coronavirus as Nov. 30 and two have been quarantined.

Council disagrees on vacating street ends next to Sewell Tract

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council bickered over an ordinance that would place paper streets and street ends in Cape May’s Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI) list.

At a Nov. 16 virtual meeting, council tabled an ordinance authorizing the vacation of various streets and portions of streets. Deputy Mayor Patricia Hendricks offered a motion to table the ordinance until council’s meeting Dec. 1.

Before the vote, Coun-

cilman and mayor-elect Zack Mullock asked when he could make a motion to table the ordinance until Jan. 1, 2021.

He said the ordinance was extremely important to the Sewell Tract and the “future of Cape May.”

Mullock said the city received notice from the Department of Environmental Protection that the ordinance would be a detriment to the negotiating process that is ongoing in the Sewell Tract litigation.

He said preserving the Sewell Tract would be one of the top goals of the incoming council.

Vacating the streets and placing them on the city’s ROSI list prior to having a plan would handicap the city for years to come, Mullock said.

He said one of the litigants in the Sewell Tract lawsuit contacted Cape May requesting the ordinance be tabled.

City solicitor Frank Corrado said the litigant did not ask the ordinance be removed from the agenda but asked the city to defer final action on the ordinance while settlement discussions were ongoing.

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