



Council amends vehicle-charging station rules

Page A2



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Rising prices exacerbating worsening food insecurity

Social service agencies say need being met for now

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave
and RACHEL SHUBIN
Special to the Star and Wave

Food insecurity has been rising in southern New Jersey since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, with prices increasing and across-the-board inflation squeezing budgets even tighter.

Social service agencies in the region, ordinarily busy this time of year trying to provide holiday meals and gifts to those in need, as well as take advantage of the spirit of giving to collect donations, are facing a growing list of clients who are struggling worse than ever. "Food insecurity is in the spotlight during the holiday season when people are feeling generous, but it's not an issue that goes away after the holidays are done," Community FoodBank of New Jersey communications manager Nicole Williams said.

The Community FoodBank is the leading anti-hunger and anti-poverty organization in the state. The Southern Branch, located in Egg Harbor Township, addresses the great need in Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland counties, which have the highest rate of child food insecurity in the state.

"About 800,000 people across the state are struggling with food insecurity and about 200,000 of them are children, so the need is great," Williams said.

She said she expects a difficult winter beyond the holidays, especially after the pandemic tax credits end in the new year. Volunteer numbers also drop off after the holidays, another need for the food bank.

"We might see an increase in need in the new year," she said. "Monetary donations are most important and make



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Nancy Hanslowe, executive director of the Cape May Community Food Closet, and members of the staff sort and package groceries for pickup. Hanslowe said simple household items such as milk and butter have been priced out of reach for many of her clients.

'Food insecurity is in the spotlight during the holiday season when people are feeling generous, but it's not an issue that goes away after the holidays are done.'

—Nicole Williams,
Community FoodBank
of New Jersey

the most impact because every dollar someone gives allows us to provide three meals."

Nancy Hanslowe, executive director of the Cape May Community Food Closet, said simple household staples such as milk and butter have been priced out of reach for many of her foodbank's clients.

"They've seen [increases] not just in food prices, but in their overall spending habits as well," she said. "We've been very fortunate with our wonderful coordinator and generous community, and we are set to do the same in 2021



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Almond Weech, compassionate ministry director at Seashore Community Church of the Nazarene in Erma, stocks shelves at the food bank.

as we did in 2020."

The Cape May Community Food Closet is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that services Cape May, Cape May Point, West Cape May and Lower Township. Its mission is to distribute groceries to low-income members of the community.

Items the food bank is always in need of include products not covered in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, such as toilet paper, paper products, personal

Food insecurity, Page A3

Helping hand gets veteran, family back on feet

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

ERMA — Everyone loves a success story, and Almond Weech is no different.

As compassionate ministry director of Seashore Community Church of the Nazarene in the Erma section of Lower Township, Weech has been helping operate the church's food bank for eight years, witnessing trend of greater need during the winter largely due to the seasonal job market in the county.

During a recent interview about the rising need for the food bank's services, Weech shared an

uplifting tale about a former client.

A young man who served in the Marine Corps in Iraq and other deployments arrived at the food bank three years ago.

"He came back home and for some reason, he wasn't able to get on his feet and ended up being homeless," Weech said. "He was living in his car and he came to us for help."

Weech said the veteran would park his car in lit areas just to be safe but sometimes was forced to leave by police. The church allowed the man to park his car in its lot.

"We made sure that he

ate — he had breakfast in the morning, he had snacks during the day because during this process, he was still trying to find a job," Weech said. "He had two kids and he wasn't able to have his kids with him because he couldn't have them living in the car."

Weech said he searched for housing for the man.

"This is a vet who has served this country and there's no reason why this young man should not have somewhere to live," Weech said. "It was just mindboggling to try to comprehend that. He should be given all the necessary tools he needs to continue his life after

his service."

The man's wife and children were staying in a garage. After a month, the man left the county.

A couple of weeks ago, he returned to the food bank at the church and greeted Weech with a big hug, thanking him for all his help.

"When I was at a very low moment in my life, you were there to help me and I just wanted to say thank you," Weech said the man told him, noting the man and his family were able to buy a home and a brand-new car.

"That's just one story," Weech said, "there are many of them."

Commemorative benches last part of city monument

Most at Soldiers and Sailors Park honor military service members

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — A finishing touch at Soldiers and Sailors Park has been benches dedicated to members of the military, some relatives of local residents and others historical figures prominent in Cape May.

The park was the second major project of the Fund for Cape May. When the city was preparing to reconstruct Rotary Park, the group formed to add features to the park beyond the scope of what taxpayers and the city would be willing to spend, according to Tom Carroll, a member of the Fund for Cape May, president of the Board of Trustees of Cape May MAC (Museums+Arts+Culture) and a longtime member of the city's Historic Preservation Commission.

"So, if the city takes care of the infrastructure, let us take care of the furniture and do the finishing elements of the park," he said was the idea.

The Fund for Cape May raised more than \$500,000 for Rotary Park, Carroll said.

The area that became Soldiers and Sailors Park was an island with a war monument that created a confusing traffic pattern at the intersection of Columbia Avenue and Gurney Street. The space was inaccessible to anyone

with a disability due to its height.

Carroll said the genesis of the project came from the city's Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Committee, which suggested the street become a bikeway and offer bicycle parking. The park has multiple entrances featuring ramps with gradual grades.

"When we stepped in, we decided we would do the landscaping elements, the benches, the flagpole, the gaslights and buy enough granite that matched the old granite," Carroll said, noting the stone the most expensive part of the project.

Part of the group's fundraising involved the benches, with the Fund for Cape May selling 16 at \$2,500 each.

"One thing I really hoped is we could get all these benches dedicated to service people since it is a soldiers and sailors memorial," he said.

All but one bench has been dedicated to a member of the military.

The Barry family has a bench dedicated to Oliver Simpson Barry, who was a member of the Women's Royal Navy Service in World War II, and Thomas John Barry, who served in the U.S. Navy from 1941 to 1945.

Lee and Jill Bellarmino

See Benches, Page A3

COVID case numbers quadruple November

By DAVID NAHAN
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — Lower, Middle and Upper townships have recorded the highest number of new cases during the latest COVID-19 surge, with two deaths reported last week, but county officials say hospitalizations this December are well below those of the peak a year ago.

Still, cases in Cape May County have quadrupled from the Nov. 26 report.

The Cape May County Department of Health reported Friday the number of active COVID-19 cases surpassed 1,000 last week with total cases at 1,071, yet another jump over the previous week. On Nov. 26, there were 267 active cases.

At this point a year ago in December 2020, the county was reporting 431 active cases so active cases are more than double that earlier peak.

"The spread of the Omicron variant is something we continue to monitor, and we want our residents to stay safe this holiday season," said Cape May County Commissioner Jeff Pierson, liaison to the Cape

May County Department of Health. "If you feel sick, get tested and avoid spreading the virus to others. Vaccines and boosters are the best protection we have currently to mitigate the spread and to also lessen potential symptoms you might feel if a breakthrough infection takes place."

County health officials said Cape May County is one of only six New Jersey counties that have hit the 70 percent fully vaccinated mark, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Thus far, the numbers of COVID positive patients admitted to Cape Regional Medical Center are well below the peak seen in December 2020," the department reported. "The recent highs in new cases reported in New Jersey are a reminder for residents to get vaccinated or boosted, and to mask indoors when social distancing is difficult."

Lower Township reported the greatest number of resident active cases with 294, followed by Middle Township with 247 and Upper Township with 140.

See COVID, Page A5



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