

Swimming, track set to start with multiple changes

Page A5



House of the week

Real Estate Resource



167th YEAR NO. 6 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2021 \$1.00



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Snowstorm puts 'cold' in Cold Spring Station

Snow falls Feb. 7 on the tracks and platform at Cold Spring Station in Lower Township.

Sudden end for St. Mary by-the-Sea

Pandemic cancels final two seasons at Cape May Point retreat

By JACK FICHTER

Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT — The Sisters of St. Joseph are preparing to close St. Mary by-the-Sea Retreat House permanently.

In 2016, they announced plans to demolish the building after 2021 and let the property return to nature. But the coronavirus pandemic has hastened the process.

"Among other heart-rending consequences, COVID-19 has affected decisions regarding St. Mary by-the-Sea Retreat House. We believe the risks of opening this season outweigh the advantages. As a result, St. Mary by-the-Sea will not open for the 2021 season. Since we will not open in 2021, it is not feasible to open in 2022. Therefore, we bring our ministry at Saint Mary by-the-Sea to a close. These are difficult words to express and absorb," the Sisters of Saint Joseph, of the Chestnut Hill section of Philadelphia, announced last week.

The sisters have operated Saint Mary by-the-Sea since 1909, providing retreats for sisters and laity for more than 100 years.

"These past months have been a challenge, struggle and, yes, even a blessing. Perhaps this is a blessed way to be open to God's plan. Let us continue to be receptive to the many blessings that will follow in the months and years to



File photo/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

The Sisters of St. Joseph have canceled the final season at St. Mary by-the-Sea Retreat House, which is now closed. Its future is unclear as the sisters wished to let the property return to nature and the borough wants to develop a science center.

come," they stated.

In October 2016, the congregation announced that Saint Mary by-the-Sea would function as a retreat house through at least 2021. However, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the cancellation of 2020 and 2021 retreat programming at Saint Mary by-the-Sea.

The closing of the facility was the result of comprehensive planning that clearly identified the need for the di-

vestment of this property, according to a press release.

"Given its beachfront location and our congregational commitment to care for Earth, our desire is to return this land to nature rather than use it for further development," the organization stated. "We will make plans to ritualize the closing and celebrate the sacredness of

See St. Mary, Page A2

AME church purchase in works by city

Plans call for rehabilitating historic building, using lot for library patron parking

By JACK FICHTER

Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council introduced two ordinances to pave the way for the purchase of the historic Allen AME Church on Franklin Street.

The church was damaged in a fire in June 2018 as the result of a moving van snagging a utility pole guy wire, resulting in a high-voltage line falling on the church's steeple tower and setting it aflame along with the church's entrance.

The purchase price of the church is \$350,000 with the city bonding an additional \$100,000 to begin restoration of the building. The purchase includes the adjacent former parsonage that currently houses the Center for Community Arts offices and its radio station, WFCM-101 FM.

At a Feb. 2 virtual council meeting, city solicitor Chris Gillin-Schwartz said a probable date for the purchase of the church

would be April 1.

"I wanted to bring in some time for council to take a look at any environmental issues, structural issues and I know that a lot of that is underway and we don't have to wait for this to be passed on second reading before you do that review," he said.

Councilman Chris Bezaire said he wanted to ensure council had two to four weeks of due diligence for any issues that surface with the property. The church is being sold in "as is" condition. The city has the option of terminating the sale if it finds the property unsuitable.

Councilwoman Lorraine Baldwin said the city had received reports of environmental issues on the property from its former contracted engineering firm of Mott MacDonald. She asked if the city's current contracted engineer, Vince Orlando, had any major concerns on environmental issues.

Orlando said he hired

See City, Page A5



File photo/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

This photo of Allen AME Church from inside the Franklin Street School was taken prior to the fire in 2018.

Lower planners OK Diamond Beach lot for Icona parking

By JACK FICHTER

Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — The Lower Township Planning Board approved variances for a lot at 9600 Seaview Ave. in Diamond Beach for use as a parking lot for Achristavest/Pier 6600 Icona Resorts, which is purchasing the property from Lower Township to use as a 45-space valet parking lot.

On Feb. 1, Lower Township Council unanimously approved the sale of the lot to Eustace Mita, the sole bidder and an owner of Icona Resorts, despite protests of the neighborhood residents.

During a virtual Zoning Board meeting Feb. 4, Frank Corrado, attorney for Icona Resorts, said a variance being requested was to continue to operate a parking facility on the lot that has been in use for five years, during which time Icona Resorts has been leasing the lot from the township.

"That's all that we're asking for is to make the variance permanent because Mr. Mita is purchasing the lot," Corrado said.

He said vehicles have parked on the grass lot without incident. Corrado said there was minimal detrimental effect, if any, to the neighborhood.

The board approved the site plan, a use variance to allow parking on the property, a variance for landscape buffers to be provided between the off-street parking areas, lot lines and street lines, and a variance to allow stacked parking.

Zoning Board Chairman James Hanson requested parking bollards be installed for additional safety. Board engineer Scott McPherson said there was no mention of relocating an existing chain-link fence, so a 10- to 15-foot buffer would exist between an adjacent playground and the fence and another 14 feet to parking bumpers.

Project engineer Vince Orlando said the applicant could provide at least a 4-foot landscape buffer to visually block the parking lot from the playground.

The lot was reconfigured to be 10 feet farther away from an adjacent township playground, he said. Corrado said the reconfiguration provides a better buffer.

Mita said when he purchased the Pier 6600 hotel, he removed 20 of the 120 rooms to create the Icona Resort. He said 122 parking spaces are on site with 45 valet spaces being added on the Seaview Avenue lot.

"We took traffic and density

down in the last 15 years in Diamond Beach, so we're now restoring what was the Pier 6600 to 122 rooms," Mita said.

Zoning Board member David Brand said he preferred to see 45 parking spots in one location as opposed to being "all over the surrounding neighborhood." He noted concrete bumpers and a 4-foot-tall fence would separate the parking lot from the playground.

Brand asked for 4-foot-high landscaping along the fence. He said Mita has worked with the neighbors and the township.

See Icona Resorts, Page A2

Free Lung Cancer Screening • Saturday, February 27

Shore Medical Center, a proud member of the Penn Cancer Network, Advanced Shore Imaging Associates, and ScreenNJ are hosting a

LUNG CANCER SCREENING EVENT • Saturday, February 27 • 9 am - 12 noon • Shore Cancer Center

Consultations provided by Dr. Charles Roche of Shore Physicians Group.

IF YOU ARE: 55 to 80 years of age; and a current smoker or have quit smoking in the past 15 year a Low Dose CT screening may be right for you.

Call for more information and/or schedule an appointment at 609-653-3484.

Lung cancer is the number one cause of cancer deaths. Low Dose CT screenings can detect lung cancer early when it is the most treatable. Early detection saves lives. Call today.

