

Caper Tigers boys soccer coach Elia retiring

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House of the week

Real Estate Resource



Women in Business Conference 'Power of the Pack'



Craig D. Schenck/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

U.S. Coast Guard Capt. Kate Higgins-Bloom, deputy commander of U.S. Coast Guard Sector Delaware Bay, addresses the Women in Business Conference hosted by the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce March 8 at the Flanders Hotel in Ocean City.

USCG captain tells tales of women leaders amid natural disasters, world affairs, virtual preschool

By CRAIG D. SCHENCK
Cape May Star and Wave

OCEAN CITY — U.S. Coast Guard Capt. Kate Higgins-Bloom credits the "power of the pack" with giving women "courage to do what you don't think you can do."

Higgins-Bloom, deputy commander of U.S.

Coast Guard Sector Delaware Bay, was the keynote speaker March 8 at the Women in Business Conference at the Flanders Hotel hosted by the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce.

Higgins-Bloom has an impressive resume that includes more than 22 years in the service. She

currently leads about 1,000 active-duty, reserve and civilian personnel across 17 field units.

Sector Delaware Bay is responsible for all Coast Guard missions, ranging from search and rescue to securing a marine transportation system that contributes

more than \$88 billion annually to the U.S. economy across much of Pennsylvania and New Jersey and all of Delaware out to 200 miles offshore.

Higgins-Bloom has had a varied career, dealing with people from frontline responders to national-level policy advisers. As a White House fellow in the Executive Office of the President, she built a national public/private partnerships to overcome veterans employment and mental health challenges.

She lives outside Philadelphia with her husband and their two young children.

Higgins-Bloom said there were two reasons why she thought it was important to speak at the event.

"The Cape May community is such an amazing Coast Guard partner and anything I can do to help foster that relationship with our partners, I'm here for it," Higgins-Bloom said. "Second, as women accomplishe-

rs, we really have a responsibility to work with others to make sure the opportunities that were available to me are available to everybody."

She said she had a chance to participate in a women's entrepreneurship event while working at the White House and really enjoyed it. "I have to tell you, being in the military for 22 years, you don't see a lot of hugging and crying at the events I go to normally, but it was so inspirational to see it and the energy. I have a soft spot for these entrepreneurs and the passion and risk-taking that they face," Higgins-Bloom said.

Addressing the gathering, she said she was really excited to be there.

"Cape May is just such an important part of the Coast Guard community; it's one of our homes,"

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Chamber marks National Women's Day

By CRAIG D. SCHENCK
Cape May Star and Wave



OCEAN CITY — A local business group celebrated National Women's Day on March 8 with an empowerment conference that brought together leaders from multiple industries for a day of networking and strengthening bonds.

The Cape May County Chamber of Commerce hosted its annual Women in Business Conference at

Craig D. Schenck
STAR AND WAVE

Amy Mahon, chairwoman of Cape May County Chamber of Commerce Board, welcomes more than 200 attendees to the annual conference at the Flanders Hotel in Ocean City.

the Flanders Hotel in Ocean City, where the theme was "The Power of the Pack: Women Who Support Other Women."

More than 200 attendees — fewer than a dozen men, mostly politicians — came together to hear accomplished speakers and a panel discussion, enjoy good food and drinks and a chance to walk away with some door prizes.

Barbara Stafford Jones, incoming president and CEO of the county chamber, said the conference is "one of our greatest events of the year."

"We bring women across various industries, backgrounds together. It's a conference of empowerment," she said, noting it also is a social event among hun-

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WHERE'S YOUR PARKING? MTRAC: Charge fee to businesses deficient in spots

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The city has had a shortage of parking spaces for at least 60 years and no one has found a solution to motorists driving in circles searching for an available spot.

Municipal Taxation and Revenue Advisory Committee (MTRAC) Chairman Dennis Crowley is suggesting the city examine the site plans that were approved for every mercantile license owner and residential property and charge those who aren't meeting their parking requirements an annual fee to the city's parking trust fund. That money would be used to fund a better jitney/shuttle service.

"Then we can find out exactly what number of parking spaces the code requires," he said March 9.

Crowley said the city code is the bottom line for everybody in the city to know how many parking spaces they must provide.

"If they have them, then that's fine, but if they don't have them and they still conduct business, then that becomes the source of the impact," he said.

Some businesses receive a variance from the city's code for parking spaces from the Planning Board. Crowley said when spaces are lost due to a variance, those missing parking

spaces become the responsibility of the city.

"There's no room in the city," MTRAC member Bob Elwell said.

A mercantile license holder who is not providing the proper amount of parking should be held responsible to contribute financially to the city to help solve the shortage, Crowley said.

Elwell said the parking trust fund was established for that purpose but Crowley said it is so limited in its scope that it doesn't solve any problems.

The fund is for applicants who are expanding or improving an existing property and cannot provide off-street parking. The applicant contributes to the parking trust fund, Crowley said.

The fund can become the source of funding for a better jitney/shuttle service, he said.

Elwell said he believes residents would support such a move for rental properties that may draw five or six cars when occupied.

Crowley said there was no enforcement of tracking the number of parking spaces on properties.

"We're whistling past the graveyard on this because our code is so clear that residences and businesses alike all have to have off-

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Lower Twp. budget calls for tax increase

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Lower Township introduced its \$32.2 million municipal budget March 6 calling for a 2.5-cent tax rate increase, or 5 percent.

The tax rate would rise from 59.6 cents per \$100 of assessed property value to 62.1 cents.

Township Manager Mike Laffey said the proposed tax levy is \$23.1 million, up from last year's \$22.1 million. He said major contributors to the proposed tax hike are increased costs in health benefits, utilities and pensions as well as inflation on goods and services.

"Insurance, utilities and pensions alone were an increase of \$1.3 million combined," Laffey said.

The township completed 2022 with a surplus of \$8.4 million and will apply \$4.2 million to the 2023 municipal budget and use \$1 million to pay down unfunded capital debt, he said.

Laffey said he expects the surplus to be replenished by year's end. The

tax collection rate for 2022 was 99.25 percent, one of the highest percentages to date, he said. The collection rate added almost \$1.6 million to the township's surplus fund.

"This year's budget anticipates a new revenue line for occupancy taxes, which is estimated to bring in at least \$514,000," he said.

The total assessed value of real property in Lower Township totals \$3.7 billion, an increase over the previous year of \$22 million, Laffey said.

One cent on the tax rate equals \$372,277, he said.

Salaries and wages total \$11.7 million, up \$316,086 from 2022. Department of Public Safety wages total \$4.9 million.

Auditor Carol Rush, of Ford-Scott and Associates, said even though the township was proposing a 2.5-cent tax rate increase, it was one of the smallest tax increases of municipalities the firm serves. She said some other towns were proposing 6- to 9-cent tax

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