



City considering digital beach tags for this summer

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House of the Week

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170th YEAR NO. 13 CAPE MAY SERVING AMERICANS' National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2024 \$1.00

Sea Isle survivors look back at the Storm of '62

'Waves knocked through the bulkheads, and the building started shaking. All of the sudden, the building lurched forward at a 15 degree angle. The picture window exploded. All the cabinets opened up, dishes were flying and breaking.'

— Pat Haffert, 12 at the time of the storm



Photos courtesy Sea Isle City Historical Society/SENTINEL

Sea Isle City, 44th Street and the beach (site of the current beach patrol headquarters), showing devastation from the 1962 storm. Below, one of the destroyed homes.

The perfect response: Ash Wednesday storm brought Sea Isle community together to rebuild

By ALICE URBANSKI
Special to the Sure Guide

For three days, the Ash Wednesday Storm of '62 battered area shore towns, including Sea Isle City, which was decimated.

Sea Isle's wooden boardwalk collapsed, many local homes were swept off their foundations and washed out to sea, and businesses suffered heavy damage. The entire beachfront was devastated.

On March 16, members of the Sea Isle City Historical Society hosted a public presentation, "Our Perfect Storm and Our Community's Perfect Response." At the event, storm survivors shared their experiences. Their stories intersperse heroism and humor, terror and tenacity, resolve and resilience.

Storm survivors echoed this sentiment, "Everything was OK — until it wasn't."

The storm raged from Tuesday, March 6, through Thursday, March 8. The nor'easter was named the Ash Wednesday storm, after the holy day on which the storm produced the most destruction (March 7, 1962.) The epic weather event is also known as the Great March Storm and the Great Atlantic Storm.

"My childhood disappeared with the storm of '62," said Joe LaRosa, 70, who 9 years old when the storm struck.

His favorite hangouts — a miniature golf course, a hot dog business, the Fean Hotel and the boardwalk carousel where he grabbed brass rings — were lost in the storm.

"But as a kid, you roll with it," said LaRosa, who grew up with his brother, Pat, in a home at 43rd Street and Central Avenue, owned by their late parents, Joseph Sr. and Alice LaRosa.



sa. "I woke up Tuesday morning, the first day of the storm, and there was no school due to flooding, and that was OK."

On the third day of the storm, LaRosa and most Sea Isle City residents were airlifted to the mainland. He remembers thinking the helicopter ride was "pretty cool."

At the presentation, LaRosa, who has written two books on the storm — "Storm Stories: An Oral History" and "Our Perfect Storm," chronicled events while retelling his personal story.

At first, he recalls, virtually no one realized how fierce the storm would become. By the second tide on Tuesday afternoon, though, "utilities failed — the sewer system, water system, electricity and phone lines went down."

LaRosa explained there were scattered homes where utilities remained

operational.

On Tuesday night, his dad, assistant superintendent of public works, drove a dump truck into the backyard of the family's home, loaded Joe, his mom and his brother into the cab and took them to his uncle's house, which still had electricity and phone service.

Conditions continued to worsen Tuesday night. One resident reported seeing refrigerators, beds, even walls with pictures still on them floating down the street.

"I woke up the next morning, (Wednesday) and there were 30 to 40 people in the house. My aunt and uncle had taken everyone in," LaRosa said. "So while we didn't know the scope of the storm, I started to think this storm was different."

Neighbors took care of neighbors.

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Spending plan keeps tax rate same for 2024

Cape May sees fifth year in row without increase

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — For the fifth year in a row, the city will have no increase in the local purpose tax rate of 36.1 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

City Manager Paul Dietrich presented the annual budget March 19 to City Council, which is expected to introduce the spending plan April 2 with a public hearing and adoption set for May 7.

Dietrich said the budget grew 9.3 percent last year. Current fund appropriations total \$26.8 million. He said the city's surplus account has more than \$14 million, \$5.9 million of which will be used for the budget.

"We also dedicating almost \$1.1 million to help pay for future capital projects," he said.

For the second year in a row, the city is taking some of its historic bond ordinances and rolling some of that authorized debt into capital projects, Dietrich said.

Water/Sewer Utility appropriations total \$7.6 million, Beach Utility ap-

propriations total \$4.2 million and the Tourism Utility totals \$1.3 million for total budget appropriations of \$39.9 million.

Salaries total just more than \$9 million for the city's 118 full-time employees and 50 seasonal and part-time employees.

Dietrich said the city is seeking to hire one new firefighter, a records support employee, a public works laborer and additional seasonal help for the Department of Public Works and the Water/Sewer Department.

The next-largest item in the proposed municipal budget is operating expenses at just less than \$7 million, a \$150,000 increase over 2023.

"When you look at it from an operational standpoint, a \$150,000 increase from last year on a \$7 million operating expense as a percentage, I think that's maintaining a pretty lean operation to have in this kind of inflationary time that we have with everything going up," he said.

Current fund revenues, See Budget, Page A2

Pot-infused dinner a breach of peace, city resident argues

Inn of Cape May to host event with cannabis, regular options

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Many years ago, a wise man said "there is nothing new under the sun," but we beg to differ as the Inn of Cape May is offering a cannabis-infused dinner.

The proposal for this first-time event raised the ire of resident Jules Rauch, who told City Council on March 19 that the event would violate the city code. He said an ordinance makes it unlawful to smoke, use or consume marijuana in a public open space, outdoor dining area, park right of way, recreation area, promenade or any area of any scheduled public event.

"In my view, it's an illegal event," Rauch said. "They have no license to deal with cannabis, they have no permits that I know of that have been issued."

Rauch said police are charged with the enforcement of the ordinance, of which any violation constitutes a breach of the peace with fines ranging from \$100 to \$1,000.

For the record, the dinner party is scheduled for 6 p.m. April 20 and offers a three-course cannabis-infused meal. A cannabis-free alternative will be available.

The party will have a DJ, dance floor and cash bar throughout the night. The event is for those 21 and older and offers package at \$225 per person that include dinner, a hotel room, \$5 snack credit, \$8-per-person breakfast voucher and recipe cards "to recreate the magic at home."

The "infused menu" offers an arugula, frisee and watercress salad with candied pecan, infused champagne vinaigrette, grilled 8-ounce

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