



Two Caper Tigers medal at state wrestling tourney

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House of the week

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Council boosts starting pay for city firefighters

Increase intended to make compensation competitive

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council approved a new contract with International Association of Fire Fighters Local 3495 that makes starting salaries competitive with other departments in the county.

At a March 1 council meeting, Deputy Mayor Stacy Sheehan, who cast the lone “no” against the contract, said it took more than one year to negotiate. During that time, firefighters commented at council meetings how low the salary was for first-year firefighters, she said.

In the new contract, the starting salary increased almost 13 percent. Sheehan said she felt the city “kind of dropped the ball” because after the first year, the percentage increase is only around 2.5 percent for the next four years.

In an 18-year stepped program, the upper steps have a 4 percent increase, she said.

“If we’re going to give a percentage increase, it should have been the same percentage over those continual four years for ‘21, ‘22 and ‘23,” Sheehan said.

She said in 2020 for 18 years of service, a fire-

fighter was earning \$85,500 while a first-year firefighter earned \$36,000. In 2024, first-year firefighters will earn \$44,500 while an 18-year firefighter will earn \$100,000, Sheehan said.

Mayor Zack Mullock said the lowest pay rate of \$36,000 had remained for 10 years through two previous city administrations.

“We allowed for an 18 percent increase right now and it’s back paid, so this goes back to the day we all stepped into office,” he said.

The new pay scale makes the Cape May Fire Department competitive with other departments, Mullock said, noting the city wanted the best firefighters it could obtain.

Councilman Shaine Meier said for 2022, first-year firefighter salaries are increasing from \$36,000 to \$42,300. He called it a major step in the right direction since the raises will not have a direct effect on taxes.

Vacation time for firefighters is changing from a three-day requirement to allowing for 24-hour vacations, Meier said.

Councilwoman Lorraine Baldwin said the new contract will entice firefighters at lower steps in the salary scale to remain with the department.

DEP’s approval necessary for PA system completion

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Completion of the public address system along the Promenade and beach is likely delayed until 2023.

The city now must obtain permission from the state Department of Environmental Protection to complete the PA system for emergency announcements from Convention Hall to Wilmington Avenue.

The city’s Beach Safety Advisory Committee met Feb. 28, when members received a packet of information on previous bids received for phases one and two of the project as well as the proposed expansion.

Councilwoman Lorraine Baldwin said the next step is working with city engineer Vince Orlando to get approval to install three utility poles on the beach to hold speakers.

“We’re kind of in a holding pattern,” she said.

Beach and Surf Zone Education Subcommittee Coordinator Tom Medvechy suggested distributing Cape May Beach Patrol materials

to schools. He said students need something visual they could take home following a beach/surf zone safety presentation.

Medvechy suggested sending students home with water bottle stickers. He said the curriculum needs to be designed by grade levels.

“The younger grades have the most simple things like what are the dangers, who are we looking for and what to do if you see something,” he said. “Maybe teaching them something about good wave versus bad waves.”

Students in third grade and higher could learn about rip currents, Medvechy said. Middle school students could learn to recognize rip currents using videos available online, he said.

Beach Safety Advisory Committee Chairman Steve Steger said hopefully new beach safety videos could be created for the Beach Patrol’s website. He said new videos could not be filmed until the ocean water was warmer.

Steger said he hoped new

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John Alvarez/Special to the STAR AND WAVE

Lower Cape May Regional High School’s production of ‘The Addams Family’ includes Dustin Nguyen and Camryn Soens as Gomez and Morticia Addams, Caylee Wilson as Wednesday, Vika Simonsen as Grandma, Savannah Brown as Lurch, Aaron Calina as Pugsley and Grant Reed as Uncle Fester.

THEY REALLY ARE A SCREAM

‘The Addams Family’ coming to Lower Cape May Regional

By JOHN ALVAREZ
Special to the Star and Wave

ERMA — Musical theater is staging a comeback at Lower Cape May Regional High School, where students will be performing “The Addams Family” on March 10-12.

The musical comedy, with music and lyrics by Andrew Lippa and book by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice, is based upon the characters created by Charles Addams in his single-panel gag cartoons, which depict a ghoulish American family with an affinity for all things macabre.

As the COVID-19 restrictions begin to lift throughout the state,

‘The Addams Family’

Showtime: 7 p.m. March 10-11, 2 and 7 p.m. March 12

Venue: Lower Cape May Regional High School, 687 Route 9, Lower Township

people are looking to find anything to do that gives them a sense of normalcy.

Jennifer Sessa, who teaches English, acting and stage craft at LCMR and has been directing the fall drama and spring musical since 2016, said

she wanted to do a play that with which people were familiar.

“I also wanted to do a play that the students were familiar with as well. Most of the students who would come out for the spring musical are gone. They graduated. All the male students in this show are brand new and only one of the students has done a full-blown main stage. They are all newbies.”

Yet with absence of experience, one of the many things that isn’t lacking is the enthusiasm the students bring to the show, she said. With Dustin Nguyen and Camryn Soens

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Contract to cut losses for summer concerts

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The summer concert series at Convention Hall has lost hundreds of thousands of dollars for the city.

On March 1, Director Kacie Rattigan told City Council that she alerted the city manager to the issue when she started her position with the city.

Council approved a new contract with concert promoter Spy Boy Productions in which the city will receive a \$1,500 fee from each show plus \$5 from each ticket sold. A concert that sells out all 800 seats in Convention Hall would pay the city \$5,500. Tickets in 2019 were priced at \$48.

Rattigan called the new agreement “a little bit of a step in a better direction.”

The city has a \$12,500 agreement with a marketing firm for advertising the concerts that she said she

felt comfortable with. The city may spend \$50,000 overall instead of \$300,000 for the new season of concerts, Rattigan said.

Deputy Mayor Stacy Sheehan said she believes the \$1,500 fee just covers the cost of city personnel working at each show. Mayor Zack Mullock said \$1,500 probably does not cover the city’s expenses for a concert.

Sheehan said Spy Boy Productions should pay for advertising rather than the city. Mullock said the new agreement is much better than past contracts.

“When we received reports on this in prior years, it was all revenue-based,” he said. “There was no discussion on the expenses. So when you looked at the expenses, the revenue looked like it was great but the expenses were higher. We were losing money, a sig-

See Contract, Page A3

Army Corps planning Diamond Beach dune

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Diamond Beach residents should have some added storm protection for their homes in 2023.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is scheduled to build dunes and berms on the beach from Hereford Inlet to Cape May Inlet to provide storm protection for the Diamond Beach section of Lower Township, North Wildwood, Wildwood and Wildwood Crest.

At a Feb. 23 Lower Township Council meeting, spokesman Steve Rochette said the Army Corps estimated the impact of a storm comparable to Hurricane Sandy if it made landfall south of the project area. Rochette said without the construction, \$175 million in storm damages would occur. With the project, damage would be reduced to \$10 million, he said.

“This is about reducing the potential for storm damages,” Rochette said.

Army Corps Project Manager Eric Rourke said the figures were for oceanfront structures and do not take into account damage that could occur behind the first row of structures.

Construction is scheduled to start in fall 2023. Initial construction cost would be \$21.6 million with renourishment every four years for a total cost of \$82 million. The federal government will pay 65 percent of the cost of the \$21.6 million project with the state covering the other 35 percent.

The Army Corps will pay 50 percent of period sand replenishment with the other 50 percent split between the state and local municipalities. It equates to less than 13 cents on a dollar for local towns.

The Army Corps would

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