

Lower, Middle split home-away series in baseball

Page A10



House of the week

B1



168th YEAR NO. 14 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13, 2022 \$1.00

New desalination plant could cost \$35 million

Cape May has firm capacity deficit, meaning growth may be prohibited due to lack of water

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Representatives of CME Engineering estimate it will cost \$35 million to increase the city's drinking water capacity by rebuilding the desalination plant.

On April 5, CME Engineering consultant Nick Asselta told City Council he participated in the original project to build a desal plant in Cape May in 1996 when two supply wells were experienc-

ing saltwater intrusion.

Asselta, a former state senator and assemblyman in Cape May County, said the plant is becoming obsolete.

CME Managing Partner David Samuel said the city does not have enough water capacity. A master plan report from two years ago indicated total water demand for the 2020 maximum month average was about 2.26 million gallons per day but the total capacity currently is just 1.9 MGD with one well out of service.

"According to the state, you do not have enough firm capacity to support any additional growth," Samuel said.

He said it is vital the city meet state water capacity requirements, adding that capacity deficits also affect West Cape May and Cape May Point in relation to growth.

The city's master plan called for installing an additional desalination unit, or "train" as they are called, in a separate building from the current plant.

The master plan also suggested a plant to remove iron at the water facility. Samuel said the city's wells in the Cohansey Aquifer have shown rising levels of chlorides and iron. He said a plant to remove iron costs \$7 million to \$8 million.

CME is proposing a project that would include removal of iron and three trains of reverse osmosis, which would allow Cape May to comply with its firm capacity plus have reserve capacity, at a cost of about \$33 million.

"We've recommended trying to seek funds for about \$35 million," Samuel said.

CME's report on Cape May's desalination plant was largely paid for by grant funds, he said.

Keith Chiaravallo, CME's director of water and sewer operations, said the city is using two trains of reverse osmosis equipment in a confined space. He said CME's proposal is to build a new facility in the adjacent parking lot that

See New, Page A8

Foreign worker shortage likely to remain an issue

War in Europe to harm J-1 visa program since participation popular with Russians

By RACHEL SHUBIN
Special to the Star and Wave

As the Russian invasion of Ukraine continues to unfold, many local hiring managers may be wondering how the war will affect the arrival of workers participating in the J-1 Summer Work and Travel Visa program.

After two years of program interruptions by the COVID-19 pandemic, area businesses are looking forward to the return of the J-1 students for the upcoming summer season. From restaurants to motels to amusement parks, many businesses employ the foreign students to fill gaps left by the lack of local workers.

"No one really knows what's going to happen with the Russian students," said Brian Hartley, vice president of Playland's Castaway Cove on the boardwalk in Ocean City. "We've had a lot of Russian students in the past and it's a very difficult situation."

Castaway Cove employees about 300 people each season and about 5 percent are J-1 visa students. The number fluctuates depending on the nature of the business and the positions available.

"We have about 15 to 20 J-1 workers," Hartley said. "We don't know what

the sanctions or appetite is going to be for those kids to come over here or for our government to allow them to come over."

Businesses recruit J-1 students prior to them obtaining visas, which requires a face-to-face appointment at the U.S. Department of State.

"The last few years things were slowly rolled out of the gate, and it made it hard for the embassies to open and get paperwork done," Hartley said. "We hope to be back to normal conditions this summer but conditions in eastern Europe are a lot different than what anyone could've anticipated."

Students originate in many countries

At Morey's Piers and Water Parks in Wildwood, Vice President of Human Relations Denise Beckson said she is cautiously optimistic about having a full roster of 500 to 600 J-1 visa workers.

"We've been recruiting since October and have been talking with legislators about the impact on our business," she said. "It's important to us to make sure we make our congressmen and senators

See War, Page A2

'It's going to be a struggle'

Tourism officials concerned about workforce

By RACHEL SHUBIN
Special to the Star and Wave

After two summers with the ubiquitous "Help Wanted" signs, many local businesses wonder what the 2022 season will bring.

In addition to the difficulty in finding local workers, there are new concerns about students arriving for the J-1 Summer Work and Travel Visa program because of the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Overall expectations are that a little more than half the usual complement of 5,300 students will participate this year, with some expecting even less.

Throughout Cape May County, from restaurants and motels to amusement parks, much of the workforce is filled by students from abroad through the BridgeUSA program.

In addition, businesses rely on the program to boost staff numbers during the peak season and at the end.

"It's going to be a struggle this year, not just with the J-1 students but the [entire] workforce," said Tracey Boyle-DuFault, executive director of the Greater Wildwood Chamber of Commerce. "It's no longer COVID, so we're not quite sure what it is, but everyone is looking for help and there will be job fairs in hopes

of attracting [workers]."

All eyes on global news

Russia's invasion of Ukraine began Feb. 24 and has been disturbing the global economy ever since. As a result, Cape May County may feel a local impact if fewer J-1 students arrive to support businesses this season.

"The J-1 issue is changing every day, and the situation with the war in Ukraine has not helped matters," Cape May County Chamber of Commerce President Vicki Clark said. "More students from Russia than Ukraine participate in the program. It just tends to be more popular with Russian students."

In addition to the hesitation of traveling so far away from home, especially during the continuing conflict, Clark said fewer students plan to come this season than in 2019.

However, despite the lower estimates, she said a full complement of international students would tally 2,800.

Clark expects the county will have two-thirds of the number of students needed. Previous years have seen about 5,300 students. She said New Jersey is

See Tourism, Page A2



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Walls are going up at the site of Cape May's new firehouse, which will be large enough to house the fire department's tower truck, according to City Councilwoman Lorraine Baldwin.

Firehouse plenty big for tower truck

Councilwoman says issue investigated, rumors untrue

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Councilwoman Lorraine Baldwin said she wanted to dispel rumors that the fire department's tower truck would not fit into the new fire station.

She said April 4 during a City Council meeting that it

is untrue the building would be too small for the department's largest piece of equipment.

"We as a task force looked at that extensively and I just wanted to make sure that's not getting out there," Baldwin said.

The fire station is expected to be completed in 18 months,

with fire equipment stationed at the West Cape May fire station, returning by summer 2023. If the project remains on schedule, the fire station would open in December.

City Council approved a \$5.1 million contract last fall with Duall Construction, of Mount Laurel, to build the fire station.

City wants to ease process for outdoor dining permit

Would apply only if no parking, traffic issues

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council introduced an ordinance to streamline the permit process for restaurants seeking outdoor dining that does not affect parking or pedestrian traffic. The proposed ordinance tweaks an existing ordinance covering outdoor dining.

Councilpersons Lorraine Baldwin and Shaine Meier worked together to craft an ordinance with city solicitor Chris Gillin-Schwartz.

At an April 5 council meeting, Meier said it was important to promote the outdoor dining experience without impeding street or pedestrian traffic. He said some visitors may still be concerned with COVID-19 and prefer to dine outdoors.

Changes to the outdoor seating plan try to accom-

modate those who have space available for outdoor dining, Meier said.

Gillin-Schwartz said the proposed ordinance started with the existing outdoor dining ordinance that governs all except the Washington Street Mall establishments which purchase patio permits from the city. The new ordinance would not affect the mall, he said.

The proposed ordinance has a provision for use of the rights of way for outdoor dining. The changes to outdoor dining regulations preserve and clarify what already exists in city code, Gillin-Schwartz said.

"The outdoor seating ordinance was designed for food service and beverage service in connection with a restaurant," he said. "It wasn't designed or used to

See City, Page A3

Sheehan questions land swap

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — A scoping hearing with the state Department of Environmental Protection is scheduled for 6 p.m. April 18 at City Hall to solicit comments on a land swap that could allow the city to build a police station on St. John Street.

City Council last month introduced an ordinance to bond \$4.7 million for the construction of a \$5 million police station on the corner of Lafayette and St. John streets that would involve the DEP approving a land swap.

The city has contacted the DEP Green Acres Program proposing to dispose of 0.14

See Sheehan, Page A3



FROM OUR FARM TO YOUR KITCHEN

Shop fresh farm-to-table flavor all winter long at the Beach Plum Farm Market

BeachPlumFarmCapeMay.com • 140 Stevens Street, West Cape May NJ 08204
(609) 459-0121 • @BeachPlumFarm

Beach Plum