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166th YEAR NO. 23 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2020 \$1.00

Show will not go on this summer in Cape May

Union says health concerns must be addressed before actors return to stage

Editor's note: This story has been updated from a previous version.

By **CRAIG D. SCHENCK**
Cape May Star and Wave
and **JOHN ALVAREZ**
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — “The show must go on” is a longtime mantra of the stage and screen. It means the production must be staged from start to finish no matter what happens.

Nowhere is that more true than in the theater, where stories abound of actors forgetting their lines for a moment only to have another performer on stage speak for them so

the scene can continue, or set pieces falling and lighting instruments failing, forcing actors to scramble to make sure songs are sung and dances are done.

But how can the show go on while both the actors and the audience are practicing social distancing and taking other precautions to help stop the spread of COVID-19? That is a question theaters are trying to answer amid the pandemic.

Performances of high school musicals to those on Broadway and every type of stage in between have been affected.

In Cape May, that involves Cape May Stage and East Lynne Theater

Company, both of which are part of the Actors' Equity Association, the labor union representing U.S. actors and stage managers. The union announced last week that its members would not be working until four basic parameters were met, meaning the show will not go on as planned this summer at either of the local theaters.

Artistic directors for both companies — Roy Steinberg of Cape May Stage and Gayle Stahlhuth of East Lynne — have been scrambling for months to arrange productions for the summer, only to have their plans derailed, delayed and ultimately destroyed.

“All I seem to do is plan, only to revise the plan, come up with a new plan, change the plan again, scrap the plan and start from scratch,” Stahlhuth said. “It’s a lesson on how to think on my feet while my mind keeps spinning.”

East Lynne had planned to open the season May 30 but could not due to state guidelines prohibiting the size of gatherings and requiring social distancing. The theater company then switched to a show with a smaller cast and hoped to open July 29, but without Equity actors cannot put together a cast, rehearse and stage a production. Stahlhuth is now hoping for a September opening.

“I was working on a possible contract with Equity with the new show when this decision was made,” Stahlhuth said. “I completely understand the decision. I wish this decision had been made earlier, but I don’t fault anyone. Schedules keep shifting every other day.”

Prior to the union’s decision, Steinberg and Stahlhuth were contacted by the business manager of the AEA about establishing safe and sanitary protocols. The union hired epidemiologist Dr. David Michaels to provide additional expertise to its safety team and advise the AEA.

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Seaman Josalyn Brown/U.S. COAST GUARD

Welcome to the Coast Guard

A recruit from forming company Sierra 198 is greeted by her company commander during a ceremony May 28 at U.S. Coast Guard Training Center Cape May. S-198 is the fourth company to complete the restriction on movement and begin modified recruit training since the nationwide COVID-19 response began in March.

Murphy slowly reopening shuttered state economy

By **DAVID NAHAN**
Cape May Star and Wave

Gov. Phil Murphy continues to slowly reopen the New Jersey economy. That means another two weeks of waiting — at minimum.

On Monday, June 1, the governor said nonessential retail businesses can start having limited patrons in their stores starting Monday, June 15. A few weeks ago, the governor allowed the retailers to be open, but only with curbside pickup.

Also on June 15, restaurants can start serving cus-

tomers at outdoor seating, but not indoors.

The following Monday, on June 22, the state will allow limited hair salon and barbershop reopening and soon after that, gyms and health clubs can reopen at reduced capacity.

All of that is part of getting into phase two of the state’s four-phase plan, but it still means small businesses will have to wait another two weeks to let customers into the stores, restaurants still can’t have

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COVID-19 cases, deaths continue their slow rise

By **DAVID NAHAN**
Cape May Star and Wave

Over the past weekend, there have been only a few positive test results each day for COVID-19 in Cape May County and one new death reported in Middle Township, but on Monday, June 1, the county reported another death in Lower Township and 10 new cases.

In neighboring Atlantic County over the same period, there were about 100 new cases and three deaths, two in Northfield

and one in Egg Harbor Township, but on Monday, Atlantic County reported only eight more cases and no new deaths — the lowest daily count in nearly two months.

Statewide, the total number of cases rose to 160,445 with 11,721 deaths as of Monday. COVID-19 cases surpassed 6.2 million worldwide.

Cape May County

On Monday, the Cape See COVID-19, Page B2

Point residents cry foul over O’Connor replacement

By **JACK FICHTER**
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT — Residents asked for an explanation why Borough Administrator Steve O’Connor was terminated in a 2-1 vote during a closed session of a Borough Commission meeting May 14.

During a commission work session May 26, held by

teleconference, a number of residents asked why Ed Grant was appointed to replace O’Connor.

Mayor Robert Moffatt, who voted against replacing O’Connor, said the actions of Borough Commission at its last meeting greatly damaged the moral integrity of Cape May Point.

“I’ve never heard from so many neighbors who ques-

tion the actions taken by the Board of Commissioners,” he said. “I cannot speak about the specifics of this case because I have no specific information. I don’t know when or why the decision to remove Mr. O’Connor was made.”

“I don’t know when, how or by whom an offer was presented to Mr. Grant,” Moffatt continued.

He said he believed Borough Commission has lost the trust of many residents. Moffatt said residents of Cape May Point deserve a full and transparent explanation of the replacement of O’Connor.

The mayor noted there was no open discussion at a work session or private conversa-

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Voters may get the final say on safety building

Petition drive seeks new vote, possible binding referendum

By **JACK FICHTER**
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The Citizens Initiative Committee has been formed to gather signatures on a petition supporting construction of a \$15 million public safety building after a funding ordinance failed two weeks ago by one vote.

If successful, City Council would hold a second vote on the bond ordinance. If it were to fail again, the issue would appear as a question on the Nov. 3 election ballot.

An initiative gives voters the right to propose and approve or reject an ordinance.

Committee Chairman Bill Murray, a former city councilman, said when council did not pass a bond ordinance to finance construction of the

building, citizens were empowered to start a petition drive to get the ordinance on the ballot, according to state statutes.

The committee needs to find out how many signatures are required to reach 10 percent of those who voted in the last general election, he said. Murray said if the petition gets the required number of signatures, it would be submitted to the city clerk for verification and presentation to City Council.

The initiative ordinance would be introduced by council and a public hearing scheduled. He said council may pass the ordinance at that time and the petition drive would be over. If coun-

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Hotels, campgrounds, rentals to clean more, offer less to customers

By **JACK FICHTER**
Cape May Star and Wave

The pool may be closed, the complimentary breakfast gone, the fitness center dark and the coffeemaker removed from the hotel room, and you’ll need to bring your own pillows, blankets and paper products to your rental home. Welcome to the shore during summer 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The New Jersey Business and Industry Association (NJBIA) hosted a webinar May 29 called “The Safe Opening of Tourism at the Shore” featuring NJBIA President and CEO Michele Siekerka as moderator. Panelists were Allan Dechert of Ferguson Dechert Real Estate in Avalon; Joann Delvescio, executive director of the New Jersey Campground

Owners and Outdoor Lodging Association; and Mayur R. Chheda, principal and chief development officer of Infinity Hotel Group.

“When we talk about recovery, we have to talk about reinvention because we know that everyone’s business model is going to be very different on the other side of this,” Siekerka said.

She said first and foremost is the health, safety and welfare of the workforce, customers, vendors and all with whom business owners and employees come in contact.

Dechert said the real estate rental industry initially was hit with a wave of cancellations but that has slowed and his office was receiving rental inquiries and writing leases.

Chheda said his hotel group See Clean more, Page A2

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