



## House of the week

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## Executive order threatens monarchs

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'Some of these people need 10 pills just to get through the morning. Who can afford that? So then they switch to heroin, and sadly heroin is dirt cheap and readily available.'

—Wendy Schmolk, emergency room nurse, Cape Regional Medical Center



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

The empty chairs with balloons tied to them bear the name and image of the 264 victims of fatal opioid overdoses in Cape May County since 2012. They were displayed during an Overdose Awareness Day event Aug. 29 at Lighthouse Church in the Rio Grande section of Middle Township.

## Opioid abuse at 'crisis level'

Cape Regional ER nurse says she sees overdose victim every shift

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

RIO GRANDE — Emergency room nurse Wendy Schmolk said she sees at least one drug overdose during every shift she works at Cape Regional Medical Center.

Schmolk took part in Overdose Awareness Day on Aug. 29 at Lighthouse Church in Rio Grande, an event that was held at sites throughout the nation.

On the lawn of Lighthouse Church were rows and rows of empty chairs. Each chair had a purple balloon tied to it and a name on it, and many had a photo and a pair of shoes from a person who died of a drug overdose. All told, 264 chairs were lined up on the lawn, each representing a fatal drug overdose in the county since 2012.

Schmolk said sometimes multiple overdose victims arrive during a shift.

"It depends on what's happening out on the streets and what is available to the folks who are struggling," she said.

The hospital has a program called CARES (Cape Addictions Recovery Services). When someone arrives at the ER suffering an overdose, whether it is from alcohol, polysubstance or heroin, a counselor talks with them after treatment and offers information on assistance and local resources.

"I've seen way too many lives lost," Schmolk said.

She said some patients are unconscious on arrival, others many have received Narcan in the field and are awake but unsure of what has taken place.

"It's my job to kind of say 'You died, you were just resuscitated,'" Schmolk said, adding that a dose of Narcan can send a patient into instant withdrawal.

"Some of these folks are angry; we took away their high," Schmolk

said.

They may also be in pain without the effects of the opioid, sweating and vomiting.

"We receive some folks that we can't resuscitate and that's the hardest because it's usually a young person," she said.

Age-wise, many overdose patients are in their early to mid-20s. The ER also sees overdoses from people in their 40s and 50s, Schmolk said.

"There is this span because they may be ones that have chronic pain, that have had injuries over the years, back surgeries, whatever it may be, got addicted to pain medicines and it kind of snowballed into something stronger," she said.

Schmolk said doctors are aware of the opioid crisis and are trying not to overmedicate. In the past, a patient could go to the emergency room with a broken arm and receive a 30-day prescription for Percocet.

"Your body can crave pain medicine within three days (of use)," she said.

A patient recovering from an appendectomy, taking pain medicine every four hours, whether needing it or not, can experience a craving for the medication, Schmolk said.

All overdose patients in the emergency room receive a urine drug screening. She said a number of persons start with prescription drugs and can no longer afford them. On the street, one Percocet pill may cost \$30 to \$35, Schmolk said.

"Some of these people need 10 pills just to get through the morning," she said. "Who can afford that? So then they switch to heroin, and sadly heroin is dirt cheap and readily available."

Heroin does not have to be shot up with a needle, it can be snorted or even licked, she said. Schmolk said drug dealers want repeat business,



SCHMOLK

so they add a little fentanyl to it, something synthetic that will make the high last a little longer.

Use of multiple drugs at the same time has presented a challenge to ER personnel, she said, resulting in death when it is unknown all they have consumed.

Schmolk has been an ER nurse for 27 years. She said the opioid epidemic is now at crisis level. At the beginning of her career, an overdose case may have been the result of someone trying to commit suicide with a drug such as Tylenol.

"Never did I experience what we're experiencing now," Schmolk said. "People don't even bat an eyelash now. We know it's an overdose, we just go into motion and get ready."

"It's young people and they're dying and it's crisis level and we have to fix it," she continued.

Schmolk is a member of the Emergency Nurses Association, which is trying to educate students about the danger of opioid use.

Those addicted to opioids are a tough population to manage, she said.

"Especially when people are craving and they want to come to the ER and they want pain medicine and they can be angry and violent," Schmolk said. "It's just crisis level in so many ways."

What is the solution to the opioid crisis?

"Get rid of the stigma," she said. "Drug abuse, addiction, whatever term you want to use, is nondiscriminatory. It can happen to anybody at any time."

Schmolk said if the stigma were removed, those addicted to opioids would seek help sooner and not feel ashamed to tell their doctor they are

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## City beaches damaged by strong winds

U.S. Army Corps arrives to begin replenishment

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Days of northeast winds last week caused erosion along the city's beaches at the same time the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers arrived to begin beach replenishment.

Hours before an Aug. 26 meeting of the Beach Safety Committee, city Information Technology Specialist Dan Shustack flew a drone along the beachfront taking video and still photos.

Beach Patrol Capt. Geoff Rife said a 2- to 3-foot drop-off of sand in the surf zone ran from Baltimore Avenue to Pittsburgh Avenue, with a 4-foot drop-off at Poverty Beach. Public Works Superintendent Joe Picard knocked down the scarp with a bulldozer Aug. 27 in a limited area.

"This is a very classic example of what northeast winds at 15 to 20 (mph), with gusts to 25, does to our shoreline, especially on the east end of town," Rife said.

He said the drop-off ended on the beach near Convention Hall.

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Beach erosion in city comes at opportune time.

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"Any time you get heavy east-northeast (winds), that's where we get a lot of rescues on the east end of town and that's where the beach erosion is the most significant," he said.

Deputy City Manager Jerry Inderwies, examining a photo of the Grant Street beach, noted longer jetties captured the sand unlike the jetty at Philadelphia Avenue. He said Congress Street beach is huge from gaining sand.

Rife said a lot of sand was lost at the cove due to the northeast winds. He said Cape May Beach Patrol lieutenants removed a snow fence from the beach.

As much as 40 to 50 feet of beach was lost at the

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## Meeting to discuss funding education as N.J. aid vanishes

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

COLD SPRING — The county's schools have been hit hard by state legislation that created a new funding formula for state adjustment aid known as S2.

During a meeting of the Lower Township Elementary School District Board of Education on Aug. 27, Vice President Pat Smith said she has been meeting with the Executive Committee of the Cape May County School Boards Association. She said the committee met with representatives of the New Jersey School Boards Association to discuss situations unique to this county.

"We're a little more unique. We're different from all the other counties in New Jersey," Smith said.

A survey was sent to all school board members in the county.

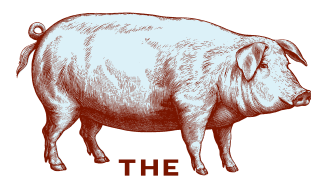
"When we got the information back, we realized the most important topic from all the boards in Cape May County from the responses that we got was funding," she said.

Smith said all school board members in the county are invited to a meeting Oct. 2 at the Bellevue Tavern in Cape May Court House that will feature as guest speaker Michael Vrancik, director of legislation for the New Jersey School Boards Association.

He is recognized as an expert in school funding, she said. Vrancik will address "how schools got to where we are today," according to Smith.

Last year, Gov. Phil Murphy signed legislation known as S2 school funding, which increased state aid in many districts but reduced aid in 172 others. Lower Township

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