

Athletes, coaches ready for fall sports season

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House of the week

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168th YEAR NO. 35 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2022 \$1.00

ICONA: City residents unhappy with size of seven-story hotel at Beach Theater

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Cape May resident Bill Seeger questions Icona Resorts CEO Eustace Mita on Sept. 1 about plans for a seven-story hotel on the site of the Beach Theater.

CAPE MAY — Judging from the amount of applause from audience members when they heard the phrase “say no to redevelopment,” not many are in favor of a seven-story hotel on the site of the Beach Theater.

Eustace Mita, chairman and CEO of Icona Resorts, was speaking to a three-quarter full Convention Hall on Sept. 1, showing conceptual designs and fielding questions for his proposed 160-room hotel to be constructed following the demolition of the remaining vestiges of the theater.

In November 2019, Mita and partners purchased the property for \$6.6 million.

On the steps of Convention Hall before the meeting, Mark Bednar, an owner of the Heritage Inn across the street from the Beach Theater, distributed fliers asking residents to “say no to a redevelopment zone.” Bednar stated such a zone would excuse a developer from the need of approvals from the city’s Historic Preservation Commission, zoning and planning boards.

Mita took the stage and refuted claims made in Bednar’s flier, saying a project in a redevelopment zone still must receive approvals from the planning and zoning boards.

He refuted a claim by Bednar that Icona heavily supported the campaigns of former mayor Chuck Lear and former councilwoman Patricia Hendricks, both of whom supported a redevelopment zone.

“It was Ed Mahaney, who was two mayors ago, and it was Ed Mahaney who brought in a consultant who said that site is ripe for redevelopment,” Mita said.

On the question of financially backing Lear and Hendricks, he said he also backed Mahaney and Zack Mullock.

“Whatever city we have our hotels in, we’re always going to back the mayor because the mayor, one of

his main jobs is to attract commerce, to encourage business so that the taxes are lowered for the populous and that the businesses pay more taxes,” Mita said.

He said Icona owns three properties in Cape May and pays \$1 million per year in property taxes. Icona owns two hotels in Cape May, the Capri Motel and one bearing its corporate name, plus the Beach Theater property.

Mita said a site ripe for redevelopment is defined as blighted, not contributing to the community and structurally unsafe. Mita called the Beach Theater a “posterchild” for redevelopment.

For seven years, Icona pursued a purchase of the Beach Theatre from Frank Theaters, which eventually declared bankruptcy and sent the theater to the auction block.

In October 2019, the sidewalk in front of the theater complex was cordoned off with yellow tape and barricades following an order from city construction official Lou Vito after support

columns were found to be structurally unsound.

The city installed temporary support rods under the overhang to shore up the structure. The deficient support columns were discovered when a person leaned against one of the columns and it broke loose.

In his flier, Bednar claimed Lear and Hendricks allowed then-city solicitor Frank Corrado to represent Mita and Icona Resorts.

Mita said he was not represented by Corrado for the Cape May project but by Stephen Nehmad.

Bednar claimed Corrado wrote a resolution supporting redevelopment at the request of Lear and Hendricks.

“The exact opposite is true again,” Mita said. “That was done under the administration of Ed Mahaney.”

He said it would take 10 years for the hotel to turn a profit.

“Why would an idiot like me want to do it?” Mita asked. “Because I love Cape May.”

The Beach Theater has been designated as not being historical or contributing to the historic district by the city, he said.

He said Icona’s goal is to build a hotel that celebrates the last 200 to 300 years of Cape May history.

“It will look like it’s been here for 100 years,” Mita said.

Architect David Schultz, co-founding partner in DAS Architects of Philadelphia, presented conceptual drawings of the proposed hotel. He said in the past 32 years, his firm has worked on 400 or more hospitality projects nationwide.

Locally, he designed The Reeds at Shelter Haven in Stone Harbor, The Boarding House motel on Lafayette Street and a home on Schellenger’s Landing known as the “boat house,” notable for its windmill.

Schultz presented a 90-second video showing scenes of old Cape May with its great hotels often referred to as “halls.” Mita said the city has an opportunity to have another “grand hall.”

“If we can’t convince you and convince the majority, then we don’t think we should do it either,” Mita said. “If we can’t convince you this is best for Cape May, then let’s not do it.”

He said never in the past has Cape May had the opportunity to build a hotel across the street from Convention Hall. Mita said most convention centers have a connection to a hotel. The new complex would also contain at least 10 to 12 retail stores, he said.

Cape May has lost about 50 percent of its hotel rooms since 2000, according to Mita.

“There is nothing we can do with this building. It’s below the floodplain, it’s literally decaying right in front of us,” Schultz said of

Cape Regional stops offering maternity care

Services available in Somers Pt., Atlantic City and Galloway Twp.

By CRAIG D. SCHENCK
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — Expectant mothers will have to leave Cape May County for maternity/obstetric care starting next week. Cape Regional Medical Center has announced that effective Sept. 10, it no longer will provide the services due to a lack of doctors.

“One of two obstetricians on staff has resigned his private practice and is joining a larger practice that delivers exclusively at Shore Medical Center,” hospital spokeswoman Susan Staeger said.

According to a 2019 OBGYN Workforce Study Physician Shortages Contribute to Women’s Health Crisis by Doximity, the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) projected a shortage of as many as 8,800 obstetricians and gynecologists by 2020, and a shortfall of as many as 22,000 by 2050.

Cape Regional Health System is working closely with Shore Medical Center in

Somers Point and AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center to develop a detailed plan for them to provide maternity services to county residents, according to Staeger. All obstetricians who are in practice in Cape May County currently provide perinatal and maternity care at either one of the medical centers.

Staeger said county emergency medical services are aware of the need to take women in labor or with pregnancy-related conditions to one of the other locations. The Southern New Jersey Perinatal Cooperative is providing resources to assist with communication and education to the community and access to transportation to hospitals that can provide maternity care.

While the Emergency Department at Cape Regional remains available for life-threatening emergencies, for any pregnancy-related concerns that cannot be managed in their personal obstetrician’s office, patients

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Library Commission awards contract for new city facility

CAPE MAY — The county Library Commission selected Merrell and Garaguso of Swedesboro to rehabilitate and expand the historic Franklin Street School for use as the county’s newest public library branch.

“This is an exciting step in the Library Commission’s work to build a new, state-of-the-art library to serve the residents of the county for many years to come,” Library Commission Chairman William Hutchinson stated in a news release. “We are looking forward to getting construction of this project under way.”

The Library Commission applied to the State Library in mid-2020 for funding to rehabilitate and repurpose the school — a facility built in 1927 as a segregated elementary school and now a designated New Jersey African American Historic Site.

The application, which resulted in the commission receiving \$3.4 million, was one of just 38 approved statewide out of more than 129 submitted.

“This is certainly a shining example of what can be

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Provided

Icona Resorts wants to build a seven-story hotel on the site of the former Beach Theater complex. It would have 160 guest rooms, two rooftop swimming pools and a parking garage with 255 spaces.



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Quilts of Valor

Korean War veteran John DiGiesi is presented with a quilt from Kathy Tweed of South Jersey Quilts of Valor on Aug. 28. See story, Page A2

NAILED IT. Rusty Nail

The Rusty Nail is back! Our famed surfer bar and restaurant is back open for the 2022 season. Stop by for breakfast, lunch and dinner—as well as delicious cocktails and the coldest draft beer in Cape May (as verified by Exit Zero Magazine).

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