

# County Commission OKs tourism ad campaign

By JACK FICHTER

Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — Cape May County Commission has approved amending the county budget to include \$650,000 from the federal American Rescue Plan.

The funding includes \$250,000 for a tourism marketing campaign, \$250,000 to identify county residents who lack access to the internet and \$150,000 for COVID-related expenses.

The county received \$8.9 million of a total expected \$17.8 million of American Rescue Plan funds.

During a County Commission meeting Aug. 24, Tourism Director Diane Wieland said the county lost 21 per-

cent of its tourism revenue from 2019 to 2020, or \$1.4 billion. She said lodging lost 14 percent, or \$383 million; retail lost 37 percent (\$267 million); food and beverage lost 25.6 percent (\$335 million); recreation lost 29 percent (\$213 million) and transportation lost 33 percent (\$157 million).

"When you look at that, one in every \$5 spent in 2019, which was a record year, was lost in 2020," Wieland said. "There's no way to make up last year's money, that's gone, but there is a way that we are working to help generate more money and expand the tourism marketing well into fall and into the winter."

State and local tax revenue was up in 2020. A total of \$1.5 million per day went to

Trenton just from the tourism industry, she said.

"We're the only county in the state that had an increase of that .02 percent, the others lost close to 45 percent in taxes that they generated," Wieland said.

The county had 2 million fewer visitors in 2020 from the record 10.2 million in 2019. The county lost more in lodging alone than Cumberland, Salem, Hunterdon and Warren counties each generated in total expenditures in 2020, Wieland said.

The county is seeing an uptick in private rentals such as those through Airbnb. In 2020, 30 percent more properties were listed with online booking agents than the previous year, she said.

More tourists are taking

road trips, which works well for the county, and travelers are not going overseas, according to Wieland. Travel agents are experiencing a renaissance and showing interest in the county, she said.

Wieland said the county has seen more multi-generational families visiting in the past five years, especially with owners of vacation homes, of which 70 percent are over the age of 55.

Off-the-beaten-path tourism has increased.

"Cape May County is certainly off-the-beaten-path," she said. "More tourists are arriving from the Washington, D.C./Baltimore area, northern Virginia, Connecticut and southern parts of New England."

She said post-pandemic

travel will not be the same since the workforce has been reduced and businesses are making adjustments that are here to stay.

Based on occupancy tax collection through May, the county is up 66 percent over 2019.

Wieland created a \$253,400 fall and winter advertising campaign that includes print ads, television commercials, podcasts and social media. She said the state Division of Travel and Tourism put together a plan in July to match what the county spends on advertising up to \$25,000 for each program.

"They have a lot of money, they need to spend it and they want to work with us," she said.

County Commissioner E.

Marie Hayes noted more visitors are coming to the county from the South. She asked if the county was marketing to that region.

Wieland said the county participates in travel shows in the Washington, D.C., area. She said the lack of workers for businesses in the county is a dire situation.

Hayes said she would like to see a "pot of money" taken as a joint venture with the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce. She suggested \$50,000 for the chamber.

The chamber could create an outreach campaign to find employees to work in the county, Wieland said.

County Commissioner Will Morey suggested some of the advertising budget be used for spring 2022.

## Hand-washing

Continued from Page A1

issued vaccination, which includes the vaccination place, date(s), and name," he said.

Elementary school staff will teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. For areas where soap and water are not readily avail-

able, such as playgrounds, hand sanitizer will be provided, Samaniego said.

Students will be spaced and staggered 3 feet apart when practical in the cafeteria. Samaniego said cafeterias are a major concern for which the school district purchased air scrubbing machines with MERV 10

filters, a carbon filter, and ultraviolet rays. He said air ionizers have been added to HVAC systems.

Kindergarten will have a shared lunch schedule in the cafeteria. Eating times will be staggered to limit mingling, according to Samaniego. Preschoolers will eat in the classroom with

plastic barriers between them. The schools will follow standard procedures for routine cleaning and disinfecting with an EPA registered product for use against SARS-CoV-2. There will be daily cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones and toys.

If a person exhibits symptoms or tests positive for COVID within 24 hours of being in the school building, staff will clean and disinfect the spaces occupied by the person. Once the area has been disinfected, it can be re-opened for use. Sharing of high-touch materials will be minimized.

The district will follow all Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines for symptomatic students and staff. Each building has a designated area to isolate individuals who become sick while at school.

Samaniego said while the CDC and the state Department of Health continue to endorse 14 days as the preferred quarantine period — and thus the preferred school exclusion period —

regardless of the community transmission level, it is recognized that any quarantine shorter than 14 days balances reduced burden against a small possibility of spreading the virus.

To that end, excluded individuals who are close contacts of staff or students who tested positive for COVID-19 may be considered for a reduced exclusion period based on community transmission levels.

Exposed close contacts who are fully vaccinated and have no COVID-like symptoms do not need to quarantine, be excluded from school, or be tested following an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. Should still monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days following an exposure. If they experience symptoms, they should isolate themselves from others, be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, including SARS-CoV-2 testing and inform their healthcare provider of their vaccination status at the time of presentation to care.

Students in grades K-6 who are quarantined due to COVID-19 will receive live stream instruction from their classroom for Language Arts

and Math and will have remote assignments posted on Google classroom. Preschool students will have activities/videos posted through a Google site.

If one positive item came from dealing with the pandemic, Samaniego said it was improving the school district's ability for virtual learning and streaming instruction.

"We have the technology, we have the Chromebooks," he said.

Videos for preschool children are in place on the school district's website, Samaniego said.

The school district can return to virtual instruction for all students in an emergency, he said.

"We are in a better place than last year," he said. "Having a percentage of the staff vaccinated helps too, that's the one thing we didn't have last year."

Samaniego said the school district is in a better position than a number of other school districts in the state of similar size because it was able to break up each grade level into small homerooms, which kept classroom populations low for social distancing and allowed transition from a hybrid schedule.



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