



HOUSE OF THE WEEK

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COAST GUARD COMMISSIONS NEW CUTTER

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Area counties fighting back against abuse



A Series

Atlantic near top of list for opiate deaths

By ERIC AVEDISSIAN
Cape May Star and Wave

MAYS LANDING — Opioid abuse has increased in Atlantic County in the past few years and with it, various programs, both private and public, to combat this growing problem.

"It continues to be on the rise, and unfortunately Atlantic County is always near the top when it comes to heroin- or opiate-related deaths. When you look at per capita, we're always up there," said Robert Widitz, the Atlantic County Department of Health's Substance Abuse Services Coordinator. "Just looking in the paper each day you can see the number of people who have succumbed to the heroin epidemic."

The New Jersey Substance Abuse Monitoring System (NJ-SAMA) gathers data on county residents in substance abuse programs, admissions and discharges.

Atlantic City had the most substance abuse admissions for heroin in 2015 with 733. Egg Harbor Township had 310 admissions, Galloway Township had 148, Egg Harbor City had 116, Somers Point had 108, Pleasantville had 107, Ventnor had 101, Absecon had 87, Hammonton had 84, Northfield had 53 and Linwood had 28.

Atlantic City had 90 admissions for treatment for other opiates in 2015, while Egg Harbor Township had 51, Hamilton Township had 26, Egg Harbor City had 25, Galloway Township had 22, Ventnor had 21, Pleasantville had 20, Somers Point had 13, Linwood had 11, and Northfield had 9. There were 27,258 people in New Jersey admitted for treatment for heroin in 2015 compared to 23,784 admissions in 2014 and 26,146 in 2013.

Statewide, 4,835 people were admitted for treatment for other opiates in 2015 compared to 4,548 in 2014 and 6,461 in 2013.

"(Heroin) is the primary drug of choice that most of the people who are looking for services are coming to us," Widitz said.

Widitz said the county re-

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Cape hopes education is the solution

By ERIC AVEDISSIAN
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — Opioids are ravaging the region and state, leaving addicts and their families to cope.

But Cape May County has taken steps to educate the public about the dangers of heroin and more recently, fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid 100 times more potent than morphine.

The county had 2,239 admissions for substance abuse treatment in 2015. Of those admitted, 59 percent identified heroin or other opiates as a primary drug of use. The same year, the state saw 69,477 admissions to treatment with 47 percent identifying heroin and other opiates as their drug of choice.

In 2010, Cape May County's admissions were reporting that alcohol was the drug of choice at 41 percent, with heroin and opiates at 35 percent. But in 2011, heroin use in the county increased, according to the state data. Admissions for alcohol decreased to 30 percent, with heroin and opiates rising to 42 percent.

County government receives \$271,000 in grants from the state for substance abuse treatment, with the county contributing \$231,000 to purchase Intensive Outpatient Services and outpatient service for adults and youths.

Former Freeholder Kristine Gabor initiated a Family Forum session in 2013 entitled "Putting a Face on Addiction," and began a county-wide effort to de-stigmatize addicts in need of treatment.

Her efforts highlighted those by the county Prosecutor's Office, Cape Assist, Cape Counseling, Lighthouse Church, PRIDE Committee and Parent to Parent, to work together to combat the growing problem of addiction.

Gabor resigned last September. Jeffrey Pierson of Upper Township won the county election in November and currently fills Gabor's seat. He said Gabor was "energetic and active" in conducting public meetings on drug abuse.

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Lower prepares to sue FEMA

Township to challenge V Zone designation for bayfront

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Lower Township is speaking with attorneys who specialize in coastal problems to initiate a lawsuit against the Federal Emergency Management Agency to contest flood maps, according to Township Manager Jim Ridgway.

He said the proposed flood maps are not yet in effect.

"These maps may not go into effect until 2022, but currently we feel their assessment of the V Zone was

not done properly because they are measuring the bay the same way they measure the ocean," Ridgway said.

He said Stewart Farrell, director and of Stockton University Coastal Research Center, is assisting the township. Ridgway said FEMA has told the township the methodology for assessing V Zones cannot be changed.

"The way that they measure, they say, is one standard way and we disagree with that," he said.

Despite an appeal last year that included expert

testimony, FEMA is continuing to keep homes along the bay in Lower Township in the V Zone, resulting in potential expensive flood insurance rates. The township asked FEMA not to treat bayside areas as if they were located on the Atlantic Ocean. At that time, then-deputy mayor Norris Clark said FEMA ignored scientific arguments. He said some homes along the bayfront have lost 40 percent of their value due to the designation.

During spring 2014, the Coastal Research Center

completed an on-site review and survey of all bayfront properties in Lower Township to determine how many homes had bulkhead structures, the top elevation of each and assess the storm protection afforded to the property by each structure. According to Farrell's study, the latter item was not intended as an engineering review but a visual assessment of the structure's condition, age, and storm resistance.

According to Farrell, sev-

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Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Good, old-fashioned fun

Thelma Cabrera of Wildwood Crest, Barbara Smith of Erma and Samantha Pompei of Cape May donned their Victorian Era bathing suits for Cape May's inaugural Paddy's Day Polar Bear Plunge on March 18.

Restaurateurs question outdoor seat fees

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The Planning Board approved a city ordinance March 14 regulating temporary outdoor seating, but not before hearing from some restaurant owners who were unhappy with what they characterized as the high cost for the seating.

City Council introduced the ordinance last month to regulate temporary outdoor seating at bars, restaurants and hotels — and to charge a fee for each temporary outdoor seat — and tasked the Planning Board with determining whether it conforms with the city's master plan.

During the Planning

Board meeting, restaurant owners questioned the timing of the new regulations taking effect in the off-season and the cost per seat annually.

Carol Menz, an owner of Alethea's Restaurant, said she was concerned the ordinance would take effect April 30, long before the summer season begins. She said the new regulations may prove to be a hardship to some restaurant owners, who may cancel events.

Menz said the fees would not be cost effective for her establishment. She suggested the outdoor seating committee reconvene to re-examine the fee structure of the ordinance.

Patrick Wall, of Elaine's Dinner Theater, said he

would like to see the formula the committee used to determine annual fees for temporary outdoor seating. He suggested a fee of \$20 per seat.

"I understand you also want to promote outdoor dining, which is the biggest thing we've been trying to do at our restaurant," he said. "People want to be outside all the time."

He asked for clarification of the goals of the city's parking fund.

Planning Board engineer Craig Hurless said temporary outdoor seats are those not approved by the board on site plans and said the ordinance is consistent with the city's master plan.

Hurless said the ordinance is consistent with the

master plan's goal to maintain Cape May's unique appeal by offering varied activities and services in appropriate areas while maintaining the city's character and quality of life. The board recommended council review the exceptions to the regulations for special events.

According to the proposed ordinance, if temporary seating surrounds a dining table and the establishment has a state liquor license, the annual fee for each temporary seat would be \$300.

If temporary seating does not surround a dining table and the establishment has a liquor license, the annual

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