



HOUSE OF THE WEEK

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WEST CAPE MAY GETS VISIT FROM CAT IN THE HAT

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'Dot' Burton remembered for kindness, fried chicken

By JOHN ALVAREZ
Special to the Star and Wave

COLD SPRING — By definition, a eulogy is a speech or writing in praise of a person. But to have so many residents of a town express praise for a specific person who is an example of the very spirit of the town is a rare and precious thing.

In Cape May, Dot Burton was one such person. When she passed away Tuesday, Feb. 24, many local residents, upon hearing the news, stopped for a moment of reflection of this wonderful woman.

"When I think of Cape May, I think of Dot and the Chalfonte Hotel," said Susan Tischler, local editor and business entrepreneur. "It just filled me with joy to see Dot and Lucille (Dot's sister) in the kitchen at The Chalfonte, still banging out those fried chicken and those crab cakes. Anne LeDuc's spring Chamber of Commerce gathering was my first introduction to the power of their Southern fried chicken and the hospitality that followed."

John Cooke, owner of the Victorian Hotel, shared similar sentiment.

"One night at a Chamber of Commerce function, Bob Mullock, owner of the Chalfonte Hotel, brought me back into the kitchen to meet Dot and Lucille. This was May 9, 2012, and I was chamber president at the time. It was the first time I had met Dot. And Dot was just absolutely excited about showing off her frying pans, her

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Crime decreased through 2014 in Lower Township

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

ERMA — Crime figures in Lower Township showed a downward trend in the past 12 months, according to an annual report issued by Police Chief William Mastriana.

In 2012, 612 nonviolent crimes were reported. The number fell to 556 in 2013 and 467 in 2014. Violent crimes were up slightly in 2014, with 39 reported compared with 33 in 2013 and 28 in 2012.

In 2014, the department answered 39,782 calls, down from 43,609 in 2013 but up from 37,498 calls in 2012.

Mastriana said total calls dropped due to less manpower available than the previous year. He said officers were just as busy as previous years.

Lower Township police made 728 arrests last year, down 12.2 percent from 829 arrests in 2013.

Indictable complaints received from the Lower Township Police Department to the Cape May County Prosecutor's Office for the year of 2014 totaled 367.

Under the Unified Crime Reporting Program, there are eight main offense classifications.

Below is a list highlighting the eight identified crime classifications and the respective number of offenses for Lower Township for the past 3 years.

Homicide: zero for 2013 and 2014, two in 2012.

Rape: one in 2014, two in 2013, one in 2012.

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Cape May demotes chief of police; Inderwies quits

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — On his one-year anniversary as police chief, City Council voted 3-2 to remove Robert Sheehan from his position. Outraged by the decision, Councilman Jerry Inderwies resigned from City Council and left City Hall.

Some of the details are shrouded in secrecy involving an investigation of a member of the police department, not Sheehan, by the county Prosecutor's Office.

The audience was filled with officers from other departments, including police chiefs from Middle and Lower townships, Stone Harbor and former Cape May Police Chief Diane Sorantino offering their support of Sheehan.

Inderwies asked City Solicitor Tony Monzo about a resolution on the agenda titled "pertaining to Robert E. Sheehan as the Cape May City Chief of Police." Monzo said it was a personnel matter. He said the city received a letter March 2 from the county Prosecutor's Office instructing council not to have any discussion of a matter that is still a pending criminal investigation with no discussion taking place in open public session.

Monzo said he would explain to council in closed session the investigation of a particular instance.

"In open session, council can discuss other aspects of the chief's performance unrelated to the matter that is with the prosecutor," Monzo said.

Following a 38-minute closed session, council returned and voted 3-2 not to appoint Sheehan as permanent chief of police.

Mayor Edward Mahaney, Deputy Mayor Teri Swain and Councilwoman Bea Pessagno cast "no" votes, while Councilman Shaine Meirer and Inderwies cast "yes" votes to retain Sheehan as chief.

Pessagno said she had great affection for Sheehan's family but her vote was about the Police Department due to an impending investigation with no facts being known.

Swain made a motion to rescind Sheehan's position as police chief. In a 3-2 vote, council approved rescinding Sheehan's



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Cape May City Council voted 3-2 to demote Police Chief Robert Sheehan to captain amid an investigation into the Police Department.

position as chief, demoting him to captain, with Inderwies and Meier casting the "no" votes.

Meier said council had just been given details of an investigation "going on in the Police Department." He said the investigation has not been finalized.

Inderwies questioned City Manager Bruce MacLeod if he had evaluated Sheehan's performance over the past year. MacLeod said he did not evaluate any city employees. Inderwies said as part of his contract, Sheehan was to be evaluated.

MacLeod said the chief's contract contained a one-year probationary period.

"I'm very disappointed with the other members at this table that voted to rescind that man's contract," Inderwies said.

He made a motion that an official investigation be launched to determine why MacLeod did not evaluate Sheehan. The motion failed in a 3-2 vote.

"I'm not going to sit here and have a witch hunt and crucify that man," Inderwies said. "If I

have to remove myself from this council, then that's what the hell I'm going to do."

"You're free to go," replied the mayor.

"I resign effective immediately from this council," Inderwies said. He then immediately left City Hall.

Remaining members of council then voted unanimously to accept Inderwies' resignation.

Sheehan said he was clearly disappointed. He said Monzo misrepresented the investigation. Sheehan said it was not a criminal investigation but an administrative investigation done at his own request.

"The investigation will include other personnel besides the people in the Police Department," he said.

Sheehan called the move by council an 11th-hour ambush.

During public comment, Sorantino said her gut was wrenching. "I never thought in 26 years I'd turn my back on this city that I love, but right now I turn my back on this city because this is wrong in every sense of the word," she said.

Sorantino said Sheehan was not the focus of the investigation, that it was another officer.



INDERWIES

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County plan to fix police building will be presented

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — County officials are scheduled to attend Lower Township Council's April 6 meeting with a conceptual plan to renovate the public safety building at the county airport.

During public comment at a March 2 council meeting, resident John Skowronski asked for an update on the possibility of the county partnering with the township to renovate and share the public safety building to house the county Office of Emergency Management.

Township Manager James Ridgway said he met with county officials and discussed bringing those officials to Township Council's April 6 meeting for a "conceptual look at a possible concept that could solve some problems or all the problems."

"I haven't seen this whole conceptual arrangement but I've had discussions there, I've been at the police department several times addressing quite a few different issues over there," he said. "I am on it. You'll be hearing a plan I feel in the next month,

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Lower Twp. man dies in car crash

FISHING CREEK — A Lower Township man died in an early-morning crash March 2 when his vehicle left the roadway and struck a tree on Fishing Creek Road.

The crash occurred at about 6:50 a.m. at mile marker 1.6 in Lower Township.

Authorities said the driver, David M. Thomas, 28, an employee of the township Public Works Department, was eastbound when he lost control of his vehicle and crossed over the westbound lane. Preliminary investigation indicated icy road conditions as a possible contributing factor.

Officers responded to the area and discovered a 2002 Ford Ranger with Thomas inside. He was en route to the Regional Trauma Unit at AtlanticCare Medical Center Trauma in Atlantic City when his medical condition began to deteriorate. Lower Township Rescue Squad diverted to Shore Medical Center in Somers Point, where he was later pronounced dead.

Thomas was remembered by his co-workers as a dedicated worker and devoted husband and father.

Mayor Michael Beck led a moment of silence prior to the start of Monday evening's council meeting in memory of Thomas.

Flood Insurance Act allows grandfathering

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — The Homeowners Flood Insurance Affordability Act, passed by Congress last year, reversed some of the regulations of the Biggert-Waters Act, which has the potential of skyrocketing federal Flood Insurance rates.

Lisa Meola, of J. Bryne Insurance Agency, answered questions from the public during a special meeting Feb. 23 at Lower Township Hall. She said the Homeowners Flood

Insurance Affordability Act, a bill sponsored by Sens. Robert Menendez and Cory Booker and signed by President Barack Obama, allows grandfathering of properties built prior to the creation of Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM). She said the act prevents flood insurance premiums from being raised more than 15 percent per year.

Meola said a number of factors affect grandfathering a property.

"One, of course, is the year it was built," she said. "If it was built prior to the FIRM, which is when

the community entered the flood rating and the FEMA program, then you have to have maintained continuous insurance to be able to be grandfathered."

Meola said there were two methods to grandfather a property: if it was built to compliance to FEMA's code at the time of construction, known as Pre-FIRM. If it is a Pre-FIRM, there were no FEMA codes to comply with but a homeowner must have maintained continuous flood insurance coverage.

When the Biggert-Waters Act was

passed by Congress, every policy holder would lose grandfathering, Meola said.

"With the Homeowners Flood Insurance Affordability Act, the one positive thing we got back was our grandfathering," she said.

A home would not qualify for grandfathering if it was substantially improved, she said. Currently, flood insurance can be transferred from one owner to another. A new owner of a home would have the

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