



House of the week

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World Series of Birding goes high tech

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John Cooke/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Firefighters work the scene of a blaze that destroyed the home and office of East Lynne Theatre Company Artistic Director Gayle Stahlhuth and Technical Director Lee O'Connor on Fourth Avenue in West Cape May.

Fire destroys home, office of ELTC's artistic director

Theater company seeks housing for actors

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

WEST CAPE MAY — A fire Wednesday afternoon destroyed the home and office of East Lynne Theatre Company Artistic Director Gayle Stahlhuth and Technical Director Lee O'Connor at 121 Fourth Ave., which also served as offices for the theater company.

No one was home at the time of the blaze.

West Cape May Volunteer Fire Company Chief Chuck McPherson said when he arrived at about 4:34 p.m. April 4, the fire was well established.

"It had come out onto the porch," he said. "The porch was totally on fire, the inside of the house was on fire."

McPherson said he believed the fire had been burning a while inside the house before becoming visible on the exterior. He said it took about 30 minutes to get the fire under control and three hours to



John Cooke/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

The home, which was used to house actors during the summer months, was completely destroyed. No one was home at the time of the fire.

extinguish it completely, including hot spots.

The fire may have started on a side sunporch behind the front door, according to McPherson. The home was wood frame, balloon construction, he said. Balloon construction uses vertical 2x4s for the exterior walls.

The county Fire Marshal's Office is investigating the cause of the blaze.

McPherson said once the fire started on the first floor, it did not take long to reach the attic. Fire companies responded from West Cape

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MUA considers vacuum sewers and four-year, \$44 rate increase

By RACHEL SHUBIN
Special to the Star and Wave

VILLAS — The Lower Township Municipal Utilities Authority awarded a professional service contract April 4 to Fralinger Engineering for an aerial flight and ground mapping of the sewer system.

The mapping will be done in relation to further the sewer expansion study completed by Fralinger Engineering.

"We have looked at the

vacuum sewer and there is an opportunity for board members to go look at that system," Director Mike Chapman said. "I'm convinced this technology is the way to go, but I want the board to be comfortable with that. We can go to the Florida sale office to see the system and big pump station in Florida."

The MUA board members were invited to see the vacuum sewer system in either Saint Michaels, Md., or Sarasota, Fla. Vac-

uum sewer systems use the difference between atmospheric pressure and a small vacuum in pipes to transport sewage to a central vacuum station. Such systems have been initiated in areas with a number of septic tanks and coastal zones.

"I want some of my staff to go to a one-week program in Indiana to learn how to manage the system," Chapman said.

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City raises taxes 1 cent; Sheehan lawsuit is half

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — In a 4-1 vote, City Council approved its 2018 municipal budget that features a 1-cent increase in the local purpose tax rate, with half the increase attributed to an \$800,000 settlement with former police Chief Robert Sheehan.

Councilman Roger Furlin voted against the budget, saying he was not happy with a tax increase.

City Council introduced the budget in March. The

tax rate will increase from 34 cents per \$100 of assessed value to 35 cents. Prior to council's approval of the settlement with Sheehan, which cost the city \$440,000 and the Joint Insurance Fund \$360,000, the proposed tax increase was a half-cent.

During public comment at a council meeting April 3, resident John Van de Vaarst asked if \$400,000 in the 2018 budget for legal bills would decrease in 2019. City Manager Neil Young said the line item should decrease as long as there were no pend-

ing legal settlements.

Resident James Brady asked what the total cost of the Sheehan lawsuit was to the city including legal fees. Young said he did not have the figure with him but invited Brady to visit his office.

"When you made this settlement, did you take into consideration that it may affect the tax rate in the city?" he asked.

Young said \$440,000 represents almost 1.5 cents on the tax rate but the city

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Plans to park cars on tracks appear to be moving ahead

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City engineer Tom Thornton told City Council last week that he sees "some signs of life" on a long-delayed project to create 30 parking spaces at the Welcome Center on unused railroad tracks.

Officials met with Barbara Foran of the state Department of Transportation (DOT) two weeks ago. The city first proposed the project in 2015 but it has been delayed by no response from Cape May Seashore

Lines, which leases the tracks from the state.

"I expressed our concerns about our inability to receive responses back from Cape May Seashore Lines," Thornton said.

He said Foran called Cape May Seashore Lines and was encouraged that the railroad was indicating a willingness to proceed. Thornton said the city has heard the same message but has not seen any activity from the railroad.

Thornton said he spoke with Cape May Seashore Lines President Tony Mac-

rie who indicated the project could begin.

Last August, the plan was altered to allow Cape May Seashore Lines limited use of the track. The railroad would be allowed to use the first 80 feet of track closest to the train station. Temporary bollards would be installed to separate that area so in the periods of time when Cape May Seashore Lines does not need to use the tracks, the city could use that area for parking, he said. The railroad has

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Open Space Board OKs grant for park at All Wars Memorial

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The county Open Space Board has approved a grant application for a park at the All Wars Memorial at Columbia Avenue and Gurney Street.

City Manager Neil Young said the Open Space Board is willing to fund \$189,000 of the park. The county Board of Chosen Freeholders must approve the application.

"Everything is looking promising," he said.

Earlier in the year, City Council approved a resolution to enter into a public/private partnership with the Fund for Cape May to create a veterans park around the All Wars Memorial.

Plans call for expanding the grassy area around the memorial and closing the one-way branch of Gurney Street, along with implementing proposed improvements such as Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant curb ramps and high visibility crosswalks. The park would have seating,



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE (file)

The county Open Space Board approved a \$189,000 grant for work to create a park at Cape May's All Wars Memorial.

lighting and landscaping.

The Fund for Cape May held its 4th annual Ice Ball on Feb. 10 as a fundraiser for the war memorial, with all monies raised by the event directed to the project.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee Chairman Bill Murray said in January that a \$33,000

grant from the World War I Centennial Commission was available to the Historical Society of Greater Cape May to refurbish the plaques at the memorial.

Converting the war memorial monument from an island into a park would include taking part of Columbia Avenue toward the Abbey.

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