

Play details Congress Hall's up-and-down history

By **CAROL R. EMMENS**
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Congress Hall, one of the oldest seashore hotels in the country, is celebrating its 200th anniversary with family-style dinners and a musical play that pays homage to its unique and sometimes controversial history. The hotel has survived and thrived through devastating fires, hurricanes, illegal gambling, prohibition and political turmoil.

The play was written by Curtis Bashaw, owner of Congress Hall, and Iraisa Ann Reilly, an actress and member of the marketing

management team for the resort.

"The play is based on many of the highlights of the book 'Tommy's Folly,' and it recounts events that occurred under seven of the nine owners," Bashaw said.

The title "Tommy's Folly" refers to Thomas Hughes, who built Congress Hall in 1816 and was derided as foolish by the locals. They did not foresee what he saw — a spectacular beachfront resort. But that is what it became, and four presidents stayed at Congress Hall and one, Benjamin Harrison, made it his summer White House.

Bashaw plays himself and Reilly plays the role of Annie Knight, who was the owner from 1904-31.

"She was stubborn and smart," and certainly colorful, Reilly said.

Reilly noted that Knight "closed Congress Hall for a decade because the city would not fix the roads surrounding the hotel and instead helped another hotel," the Hotel Cape May. Congress Hall began to decay and became an eyesore until 1920, when Knight and the city of Cape May reached an agreement: the city agreed to pave Beach Avenue and she agreed to rebuild the historic hotel.

But it continued to have its ups and downs and was closed again in 1991. After extensive renovations, Bashaw re-opened it in 2002.

For the bicentennial dinner/play it was a challenge, said Bashaw, to "marry current tastes with our historic menus." At one time jellied calves head and deviled kidneys were on the menu, but he and executive chef Jeremy Einhorn were sure they would not appeal to today's dinner guests. Instead the menu now includes such favorites as pot roast, cod fish and rice pilaf made with local produce.

Congress Hall owns

Beach Plum Farm, a 62-acre organic farm only a few miles away that supplies much of the food for the hotel.

"I was glad to reconstitute farm land and make it productive. The farm has its own chickens and pigs; it grows over 100 vegetables, herbs and fruit," Bashaw said. "This season it produced approximately 1,000 watermelons and tons of cooking tomatoes we'll use for pizza in the Boiler Room."

Bashaw pointed out that Congress Hall had its own farm for decades and that the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette called it "the finest in the

land."

"In recent years, the farm-to-table movement has grown and we have been in the forefront," he said. Like the Broadway musical play "Hamilton," which is sold out for months, the history of Congress Hall demonstrates that history is not boring.

Join the 200th birthday celebration of Congress Hall. Sing along with the performers, savor a mouth-watering dinner and blow out the candles on a birthday cake. Dinners are at 6 p.m. Thursdays through Aug. 25. For more information or to make a reservation, call (609) 884-6554.

Parking

Continued from Page A1

better because Cape May is a village and "no one can create on-site parking without destroying the historic fabric of what makes people want to come here."

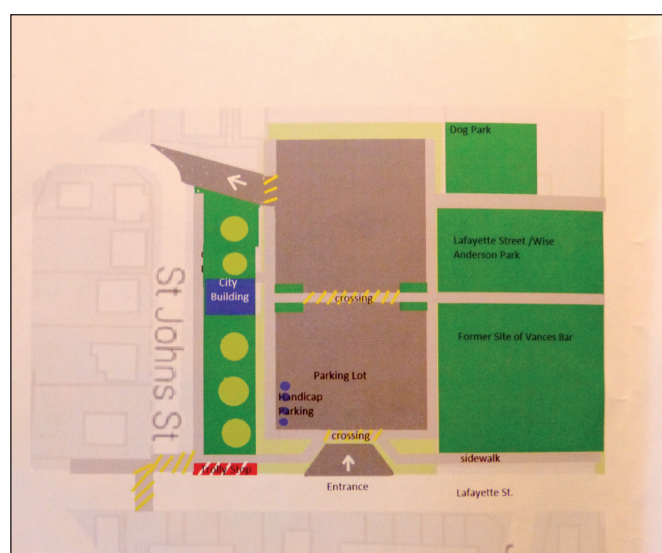
The committee is assisting City Solicitor Tony Monzo to create an ordinance to regulate and charge a fee for seasonal outdoor dining.

City Councilman Shaine Meier suggested a parking lot be created at Lafayette Street and St. John's Avenue, the former Wise-Anderson Park and site of ongoing remediation from Jersey Central Power and Light (JCP&L) due to a former coal-gasification plant on the property. The site is in the planning stage for the final phase of the new Lafayette Street Park.

Meier said he viewed plans for that section of the park that included some parking in a semi-circular driveway, something he said was not a good idea.

"This takes cars off Lafayette Street, which is the city's busiest street, and then puts them back onto Lafayette Street," he said.

His plan does not fun-



Cape May City Councilman Shaine Meier suggested a parking lot be created at Lafayette Street and St. John's Avenue to get cars off Lafayette Street and onto Broad Street.

nel cars back to Lafayette Street.

"I think putting a parking lot in this location will take cars off Lafayette Street and put them onto Broad Street," he continued. "This location is two blocks from the post office, the center of town, three blocks from the Rotary Park and the mall."

Meier said he believed

blacktopping an area that had toxic materials below the ground was a good idea. He said a parking lot at Lafayette Street and St. Johns Avenue would get cars out of the center of town and let pedestrians instead walk to that location.

His design includes a trolley stop, street crossings and a home on St. Johns Street purchased by the city.

"This may be our last opportunity to have a real go at getting some parking," Meier said.

Mahaney said Meier's design deserves to be looked at but there are some legal and physical preclusions "as well as some grants that were obtained under other circumstances for the uses."

City Manager Bruce MacLeod said part of phase two remediation from JCP&L was to build a small filtration processing facility for groundwater near the border with the wooded area. Meier expressed concerns with contaminated water reaching nearby Cape Island Creek.

Desatnick Foundation receives big donation from Diantonios

CAPE MAY — The Desatnick Foundation and Beach Creek Oyster Bar and Grille recently completed its second annual concert series.

Worldwide professional surfing icons-turned musical talents Donavon Frankenreiter and Tom Curren played in front of sell-out crowds two nights on the deck at Beach Creek.

The Diantonio family made a \$3,000 donation to the Desatnick Foundation before the concert began Aug. 2. Other sponsors in-

cluded Spy Boy Productions, The Spot in Avalon, Harbor Outfitters and Slack Tide Brewing Co.

"We are overwhelmed by the generosity by Chris Diantonio and the entire Beach Creek family. The funds raised allow our nonprofit to contribute to local victims of spinal cord injury that live or were injured in Atlantic,

Cape May, Cumberland and Ocean counties," foundation President Chad de Satnick said. "Along with the Cape to Cape Paddleboard Race,

this concert series helps our foundation to raise funds to help those living with paralysis. We are very excited about the years to come, and to bring more recognizable names in the music world to South Jersey in order to bring more awareness to spinal cord injury."

The Desatnick Foundation helps individuals and families cope both financially and emotionally with spinal cord injury. For more information, visit desatnick-foundation.org.



Samantha Haines is one of four members of the Cape May Beach Patrol featured in a beach safety video created for the city in a bid to prevent injuries in the surf.

Beach safety videos

Continued from Page A1

and will be available on YouTube by typing in Cape May Beach Patrol in the search box. The beach safety videos will also be available at the city's homepage: capemaycity.org, capemay-beachpatrol.com, and on Comcast's Channel 9. Coskey said the target audience is young people.

"One of our thoughts was before a beach movie, play a different video every week and also to utilize Convention Hall's screen to play the videos as well," Coskey said.

While no alterations have been made to the city's beaches to prevent head and neck injuries from a sharp drop-off known as a beach slope, the city has stepped up an information campaign. Last month, City Manager Bruce MacLeod

reported the city's beach safety brochure is now on the city's website and two email blasts were sent prior to the July Fourth weekend to warn bathers of the shore break.

The brochure was updated this year to put more emphasis on preventing neck, head and back injuries. At a November meeting, Cape May Fire Chief Alex Coulter confirmed the city experienced 51 surf-related injuries last year.

TIDES : August 2016

DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
10	1:37	2:23	7:43	8:28
11	2:31	3:18	8:31	9:27
12	3:30	4:14	9:24	10:25
13	4:31	5:07	10:17	11:18
14	5:27	5:57	11:09	
15	6:18	6:43	12:07	11:59
16	7:05	7:27	12:52	12:47
17	7:50	8:10	1:35	1:34

MOON PHASES

First quarter, Aug. 10 • Full moon, Aug. 18

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