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'Appearance of conflict' changes theater vote

By **CHRISTOPHER SOUTH**
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY – After denying a partial demolition permit for the Beach Theatre to Frank Investments, last month, Historic Preservation Commission member Maryann Gaffney was forced to recuse herself, eliminating her vote to deny the permit.

During a closed session meeting on Monday, June 11, held before any application was heard, commission attorney Robert Fineberg told the HPC the applicant was concerned about the "appear-

ance of a conflict of interest" regarding Gaffney because her husband William Gaffney is a member of the Beach Theatre Foundation.

The Beach Theatre Foundation, Inc., according to its website "is a not-for-profit organization formed to preserve and restore the historic Beach Theatre in Cape May, New Jersey and utilize the complex as a state-of-the-art showcase for cinema and the arts."

In the initial vote, Bill Sapanaro, Gerry Beauchamp and Skip Loughlin voted to approve the demolition permit, which would allow the

owners to demolished the 1950 theater, while preserving the surrounding retail space. Members Pip Campbell, Corbin Cogswell and Bob Steenrod joined Gaffney in voting against approval, denying the application by a 4-3 vote.

On Monday, Gaffney was advised she should recuse herself due to her husband's involvement with the Beach Theatre Foundation, and alternate HPC member Warren Coupland was allowed to vote. Coupland was present during the hearing when the initial vote was taken and heard all the testi-

mony and comments regarding the application. Fineberg said no other testimony would be heard, Monday night.

Coupland then voted "yes" to approve the application, which changed the final result and granted Frank Investments the partial demolition permit by a 4-3 majority.

Coupland said he found the applicant's presentation compelling, including the renovation of the façade. He described the back and sides as a "cement cavity," and said the roof had no historic value.

Steve Jackson, president of the Beach Theatre

Foundation, said he was curious how the HPC members who voted to approve the demolition permit application made their decision.

"What did they review? They obviously feel no historical significance to the building – how did they come to that conclusion?" he said.

Jackson said Joan Berkey, an architectural scholar who is an expert in determining historical significance of buildings, said the Beach Theatre has historical significance. The structure is listed as a non-contributing struc-

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Lower Cape May Regional Class of 2007



Congratulations, graduates!

About 200 graduates of the Class of 2007 at Lower Cape May Regional High school tossed their hats in the air at the end of their commencement exercises, held Wednesday, June 13, on the Steven Steger Field. Senior class president Virginia Clark gave the opening address. Stephanie Morrison and Catherine Booth delivered the valedictory and salutatory addresses, respectively. West Cape May's Cheska Hull Dietsch, student council president, gave the farewell speech.

Photos by Christopher South

Memorial held for cats killed in Animal Outreach fire

By **LESLIE TRULUCK**
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT – "Squirmy, Itsy Bitsy, Chicken Little..." Bill Campbell read the names of the deceased cats to a somber crowd of residents, volunteers, directors, dogs, young and old animal lovers alike who gathered at the Cape May Point Lighthouse the evening of Saturday, June 9.

Flowers, framed photos of each cat, and a sea of orange ribbons – representing sup-

port for feral cat programs – displayed the importance of the event for nearly 100 community members. White carnations were handed out to place into the ocean in tribute to the lost cats.

The crowd was united in mourning and support for the Animal Outreach shelter and Cape May's TNR trailer, which burned down May 18, killing 37 cats and causing challenges for the Animal Outreach program.

Animal Outreach works in cooperation with Cape May's

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) program, part of the National Feral Cat Resource, which specializes in taking cats from the wild and preparing them for either adoption or release back into the wild.

Animal Outreach director, Jay Schatz, said that the TNR program benefits the community because it enables the cats to keep the rodent and mice population down without reproducing.

"I don't think the cat population is making a dent on migrating birds as opposed to

loss of habitat," he said. "The city has bought into the fish and game plan."

Campbell believes the program is being attacked more so now after the fire in an attempt to get rid of the program. State opposition to the TNR program is concerned with the threat of the feral cats to various endangered species of birds that migrate to and through Cape May.

"We have no evidence to suggest such," Schatz said. "If that is the case then we must concern ourselves with other predator species like possums, raccoons, and snakes."

Ted Cassidy, Chaplain of the Marianist Family Retreat Center, offered a blessing of the lost cats.

"In the tradition of Saint Francis of Assisi we remember the poor innocent creatures and also the other pets

we have had through the years," he said.

Mother Joan Jackson of the Episcopal Church of the Advent said, "We must give thanks to all the animals who have given us love through the years."

Jackson has performed many memorial services for people, but this was Jackson's first animal memorial.

"There is a common thread because we who have had pets know how deeply it hurts," she said.

Local resident Michael Murphy quoted Albert Einstein, saying, "Not every thing that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted."

Murphy read what he called "a sad list" of the material items lost in the fire but he said he couldn't possibly tally up the companionship and

hope the cat shelter held for those involved.

"We have lost 37 friends at once," Murphy said. "No scale, measuring tape, or timepiece has the ability to measure the things not on the list." Murphy offered words of hope saying, "the love is not lost."

Campbell said a male black cat "Denzel," who was known to leave the shelter and was reported missing after the fire was discovered, was found on the eve of the memorial service.

"(Denzel) is a ray of light on a dismal day," he said.

Harry Bellangy, a member of the Animal Outreach board, delivered comments to city council about the positive recognition the TNR Feral Cat reduction program brings

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Leslie Truluck/Cape May Star and Wave

A woman tosses a white carnation into the ocean at the Cape May Point State Park last Saturday during the memorial service to the 37 cats who were killed in the May 18 Animal Outreach fire.

What's up at the Sea Mist?

By **R.E. HEINLY**
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY – probably one of the most frequently asked question these days in Cape May is not about mall renovations or beach tents, or the Beach Theater, or even about the new parking meters. It's "what's happening to the Sea Mist?" It comes from people walking by on the promenade, from passengers in cars driving by on Beach Avenue, and even from people in tour boats cruising by offshore.

The Sea Mist has become the epicenter of preservationist angst in a town whose already high level of preservationist concerns have been exacerbated in recent years by an explosion of condominium conversion and construction.

The Sea Mist's location at 927 Beach Avenue, its high visibility, unique form, and status as one of the town's most recognizable, photographed and beloved buildings have made it the center of attention.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) Chairperson, Skip Loughlin and Cape May Conservation Officer Bill Callahan have been inundated with a daily flood of questions about the work at the Sea Mist.

"Bill and I get many questions every day about the Sea Mist," Loughlin said recently. "We're very aware of the public's concerns and apprehensions about what's going on there. We understand there's much public shock." "We're monitoring the work

there daily and it's all in compliance with the plans approved by the HPC and the city," Callahan stressed.

Now what's happening at the Sea Mist is an extensive renovation which will eventually first stabilize a deteriorating structure and then restore it to its former appearance. Barry Sharer, one of the owners of Sea Mist Cape May LLC, wants residents to rest assured the plans are to maintain the historic and beloved appearance of the building. The architect's drawings appear to confirm this. Those plans are available for public review at the Construction Office in City Hall by appointment. Soon an illustration of the

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