



## ELTC names theater for Clemanses

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## House of the Week

Real Estate Resource



169th YEAR NO. 51 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2023 \$1.00

# Professor makes Higbee Beach living classroom

## Stockton University students get a lesson in local ecosystems on Cape May Canal

By **SUSAN ALLEN**

Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — During fall migration, warblers, raptors and monarch butterflies traveling down the East Coast funnel through the Cape May peninsula.

Last week, Jason Kelsey and students in his Coastal Ecosystems class followed a sliver of their migratory route to learn more about habitats and differences in natural and developed

coastlines.

With Cape May on National Geographic's top 10 list of birding destinations in the world, students packed binoculars for the field trip.

The class, part of Stockton University's Coastal Zone Management master's degree program, met at Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area to explore the natural bayshore and then took a short drive downtown to look at how beach engineering can reshape the

coast.

Kelsey first took students to the Cape May Canal, home to the Cape May-Lewes Ferry, to climb up a mound of dry mud concealed by tall phragmites reeds.

The canal is dredged to keep the channel deep for safe passage, and the mud is deposited on the Higbee Beach side of the canal. At the top, the sun-scorched mud cracked apart into fragments. Coyote prints revealed that the students

weren't the only ones to explore the otherworldly landscape hidden by the dense vegetation that surrounds the base.

Casey Manera, an environmental studies graduate from Millville, has been visiting Higbee Beach since high school and "fell completely in love with all things wetlands" after taking Kelsey's Wetlands Ecology class a couple of years ago. Now she's considering returning to Stockton for a master's degree in Coastal Zone Man-

agement.

The field trip led Manera to new perspectives on a familiar place.

"I always knew the dredge spoil hill existed but never viewed it as a valuable part of the land. Learning that the mud can house dormant seeds was super interesting, and this huge mudflat also serves as a time capsule," she said. "Kelsey explained that footprints can

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# Boat abandoned at Higbee Beach destroyed by fire

## Craft scheduled for removal by Sea Tow later on same day

By **JACK FICHTER**

Cape May Star and Wave

HIGBEE BEACH — A sailboat named the Panache abandoned on the beach in October burned during the early morning hours of Dec. 12, destroying the vessel and leaving behind a pile of melted debris.

Firefighters responded from Cape May Point, West Cape May and Cape May.

Sea Tow had been contracted to remove the boat intact Dec. 12 but wound up instead removing the remaining pieces of the craft from the beach.

Capt. Jack Moran of Sea Tow Cape May said the boat did not have a working engine. He said the original owner of the Panache had gifted the boat to two men who intended to sail it to a location on Chesapeake Bay and restore the craft.

Moran said the boat was beached while sailing at night with no motor. He said the men walked away from the boat, leaving the owner with the burden of

removing it from the beach.

The boat attracted the attention of the public since it was located next to the "ghost tracks" on the beach, the historic remains of tracks that once served a sand plant and are visible only occasionally.

Lower Township Police Deputy Chief Donald Vanaman told the Star and Wave the department received a call reporting the burning boat at 6:56 a.m. He said the county fire marshal and Lower Township police detectives were on the scene. Vanaman said the state Division of Fish and Wildlife was taking the lead on the investigation.

"There's no insurance on it, so there's no potential for insurance fraud," he said.

Vanaman said the initial investigation did not point to suspicious activity.

Calls to the county fire marshal's office were not answered and the office's voicemail box was full, and an email from the Star and Wave was not answered.



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

## A walk in the park

Cape May's official Christmas tree resides in a highly illuminated Rotary Park.

# Committee to consider artificial turf for lawns

By **JACK FICHTER**

Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — What do you do when you need more information on a controversial subject? You form a committee.

The city's Planning Board discussed an ordinance that would ban artificial turf as a replacement for grass during a meeting Dec. 12 but hesitated to support a total ban, instead opting for a second opinion.

A committee will be formed with members of the planning and zoning boards and Environmental Commission. The Planning Board will take up the issue before City Council acts.

There was discussion

about whether the turf already is banned and argument that there are instances in which it would be beneficial.

Planning Board engineer Craig Hurless said a member of the city's Zoning Board questioned an application that included artificial turf. He said there is no ban in any city ordinance.

However, he did say there is language in an ordinance that has been interpreted through the years as prohibiting it. It states that any part of a site not used for building, loading or parking spaces, sidewalks or storage areas must be landscaped with trees, bushes, shrubs, ground

See **Artificial**, Page A2

# Wildwood Crest will join Lower for court services

By **JACK FICHTER**

Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Lower Township will provide municipal court services for the borough of Wildwood Crest through a shared services agreement beginning next year.

At a Dec. 4 meeting, Lower Township Council approved a shared services agreement totaling \$145,000 in 2024, \$159,650 in 2025 and \$164,440 in 2026. Wildwood Crest is to make quarterly payments on March 1, June 1, Sept. 1 and Dec. 1 of each year.

The enabling resolution notes state law allows two or more municipalities to agree to provide jointly for courtrooms, chambers, equipment, supplies and employees for their municipal courts and

agree to appoint judges and administrators without establishing a joint municipal court.

Lower Township has agreed to enter into a shared services agreement to provide the borough with all the usual and ordinary services of a municipal court through the existing Lower Township Municipal Court.

Lower Township agreed to provide at its cost and expense all usual and ordinary judicial and administrative services to the borough including the physical court facilities, the service of the Lower Township municipal court judge, municipal prosecutor, municipal public defender and other court staff and equipment and

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Annette Patton/Special to the STAR AND WAVE

Nothing but a burning pile of charred wood and melted debris was left after the Panache, a sailboat that was abandoned near the 'ghost tracks' at Higbee Beach, caught fire Dec. 12.



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