

Caper Tiger baseball clinches CAL National Division

Page A8



House of the week

Page B1



# Arrive Together pairs police with mental health experts

**By JACK FICHTER**  
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — When police respond to a call for assistance in which an individual may be suffering a mental health crisis, the immediate goal is to de-escalate the situation.

A pilot program is starting in Lower and Middle townships called Arrive Together, which sends a mental health professional to a home where police have been called to assist someone in emotional distress.

The townships have a one-year contract with mental health professionals Acenda Integrated Health.

Arrive is an acronym for Alternate Responses to Reduce Instances of Violence and Escalation.

Cape May County Prosecutor Jeffrey Sutherland held a meeting with local law enforcement administrators April 26 at the Millman Center in Villas to introduce the program.

He said the initiative came from the state Attorney General’s Office. The service, which sends a screener from Acenda to the scene with law enforcement officers, will be available 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday.

“If there is an individual that suffers either from chronic mental illness or is having a certain event and there’s a call or law enforcement comes upon the person, hopefully, as soon as possible, we have a mental health person correspond in a separate vehicle depending on the situation and react in a way that would de-escalate and hopefully get that person home safely and in certain situations directed toward services,” Sutherland said.

It may take more than one visit to help the person, he said.

Middle Township Police Chief Christopher Leusner said his officers are experiencing an increase in issues related to mental health. He said it is important to provide help for those individuals so that police do not have to revisit the person’s home multiple times.

Leusner said there have been instances in which an officer had contact with an individual 30 times in two weeks.

“Police officers don’t want to see people suffer, they want to see them get help and this program is going to be able to help us do that,” he said.

The Arrive Together program will result in a safer community and better outcomes with less use of force, Leusner said. The goal is to expand the program to respond 24 hours per day, seven days per week countywide, he said.

Jimmy Reed, Acenda supervisor for crisis screening teams, said their goal is to aid law enforcement as much as possible and keep people out of the emergency room. He said their mission is to link individuals in mental health crises with needed services.

See Arrive, Page A5



## Writer discusses inspirations for city-based novel

‘Thicker than Water’ author Quinn set tale in World War I, Prohibition

**By CRAIG D. SCHENCK**  
Cape May Star and Wave

OCEAN CITY — Historical fiction novelist Laura Quinn drew on her extensive knowledge of the Cape May and Philadelphia areas for the setting in her first book, “Thicker than Water.”

The author from Monroe Township, Gloucester County, spent her childhood visiting the shore towns along the cape, where her grandparents rented a home in West Wildwood and later bought a condo in North Wildwood.

She said her grandmother would often take her to Cape May for ice cream, strolling the Washington Street Mall and wandering the historic district to look at the “Painted Ladies.”

“I’ve always been a history buff and, being only an hour or so inland, took advantage of the many tours offered by Cape May MAC,” she said.

Quinn shared information about her book and writing process with the Friends & Volunteers of the Ocean City Free Public Library and guest during the annual Spring Author Tea on May 4 at The Flanders.

“Thicker than Water,” the first in an intended trilogy set during the World War I and the Prohibition era, was released in May 2022. She called

Craig D. Schenck/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Laura Quinn, author of ‘Thicker than Water,’ speaks during a luncheon Thursday in Ocean City. Top left, hats were in order during the Spring Author Tea at The Flanders.

her book a “love letter to the region.”

Quinn, who said she grew up in a violent, alcohol-fueled environment until moving in with her grandparents, drew heavily on her own experiences when developing her characters.

“I wanted to depict, with raw honesty, what life is like amid fear, chaos and dysfunction. To give a voice to the voiceless,” she said, noting doing so was part of her healing journey.

Quinn said her happiest memories where spending time with her grandparents, who “instilled

See Writer, Page A2

## Lower approves budget, 2.2-cent tax rate increase

Council curbs cost impact from initial spending plan

**By JACK FICHTER**  
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Lower Township Council adopted its 2023 municipal budget May 1 with a tax rate increase of 2.2 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

The good news? It’s lower than the 2.5-cent increase called for in the budget’s introduction in March. A home assessed at \$250,000 will see a municipal tax increase of \$56 for the year.

The local tax levy is \$23,021,351 compared to \$22,019,630 last year, an increase of \$1.1 million, according to Township Clerk Julie Picard, who presented the change in the budget due to the absence of Township Manager Mike Laffey.

She said the major contributors to the increase were insurance, utilities and pensions for a total of \$1.3 million combined.

Picard said the township completed 2022 with a surplus of \$8.4 million. Of that balance, \$4.3 million is being applied to this year’s budget and \$1,065,000 being used to pay down unfunded capital debt. Surplus will be replenished by the end of the year, she said.

The tax collection rate for 2022 was 99.25%, one of the highest to date, Picard said, adding almost \$1.6 million to surplus funds.

This year’s budget anticipates a new revenue line from occupancy taxes of at least \$514,000, Picard said. She said the total assessed value of real property in the township is \$3.7 billion, an increase from last year of over \$22 million.

One cent on the tax rate equals \$372,277. The budget uses a 97.14 % rate to compute the reserve for uncollected taxes, Picard said.

See Lower, Page A3

## Lower elementary district keeps 23-24 tax rate same

**By JACK FICHTER**  
Cape May Star and Wave

COLD SPRING — The Lower Township Elementary School District Board of Education approved its 2023 budget April 26 with no increase in the local purpose tax.

State aid due to S2 legislation is decreasing by \$997,730, a total of about 38 percent over the last two years. Equalization aid, due to S2, dropped from \$1.4 million to \$415,022.

The amount to be raised by local purpose taxes is \$19.2 million. The tax rate per \$100 of assessed value remains at 51.3 cents.

Preschool education aid is increasing from \$3.3 million to \$3.5 million. State aid for the school choice program unexpectedly increased by \$102,000, according to Superintendent Jeff Samaniego.

Under appropriations: salaries and wages total \$14.6 million, up \$103,260 from last year with benefits increasing from \$6.1 million to \$6.9 million.

Total appropriations are increasing from \$25.8 million to \$26.8 million. The budget uses \$3.6 million of surplus, up from \$1.9 million last year.

Issues and concerns for the future include the expiration of an Esser Grant in June 2024 that funds six teaching positions. Another round of S2 state said reductions are expected with an estimated loss of \$400,000.

The district continues to be challenged to find bus drivers, bus aids, food service and day care workers.

Samaniego said his main goal was accomplished, keeping all non-tenured

See School, Page A2

## Cape May school budget drops tax rate half-cent

**By JACK FICHTER**  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — While spending is up, taxpayers will see a reduction in the local purpose tax rate from Cape May City Elementary School due to an increase in ratables and equalized property values.

Total ratables in Cape May are \$2.9 billion, up \$22 million from 2022.

The local purpose tax rate is dropping .5 cents from 5.3 cents per \$100 of assessed property value to 4.8 cents. The tax levy totals \$1.9 million, a 2 percent increase.

The Cape May City Elementary Board of Education approved its 2023 budget April 27 during a special meeting. Business Administrator John Thomas said enrollment has remained steady with 155 students last year even though it varies as children of U.S. Coast Guard families transfer in and out during the school year.

Enrollment increased due to an early childhood development program, he said.

State aid remained the same as 2022 for transportation, special education and security purposes while school choice aid increased from \$168,576 to \$194,004. Military impact aid totaled \$1.2 million.

State adjustment aid fell from \$72,583 to \$66,714. Preschool aid increased from \$446,318 to \$500,256,

Thomas said. Overall, state aid increased by \$198,603.

Due to state S2 legislation, which modified school funding law to eliminate adjustment aid, the school is required to increase its tax levy by 2 percent this year even though that is not necessary due to the increase in state aid, Thomas said.

Under expenditures, the budget earmarks 40 percent for instruction, which includes teacher salaries, 23 percent for facilities and 20 percent for benefits.

Basic skills and remedial instruction costs increased from \$99,230 to \$212,330 due in part to the COVID pandemic, Thomas said.

More students are attending the county Special Services School, increasing the cost from \$116,298 to \$206,505.

Guidance expenses increased from \$52,322 to \$88,580. Library expenses dropped from \$45,700 to \$19,000 since the school no longer has a teacher acting as librarian.

The state sets a limit on administrative costs per pupil which cannot be exceeded. Thomas said Cape May’s administrative cost per pupil is \$2,430, \$4 below the state limit. Overall cost per pupil in the 2023 budget is \$28,381.

The budget is available on the school’s website under the board of education section: cmcboe.org.

CLASSIC AMERICAN FARE

MADE USING FARM-FRESH INGREDIENTS

..... homespun breakfast, lunch & dinner favorites .....

THE BLUE PIG TAVERN

LOCATED AT CONGRESS HALL IN CAPE MAY

TheBluePigTavern.com (609) 884-6422

