

Cape May Star and Wave

161ST YEAR NO. 12 CAPE MAY, N.J. SERVING AMERICA'S NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK CITY WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2015 75¢



HOUSE OF THE WEEK

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LCMR GIRLS ARE SOUTH JERSEY CHAMPIONS

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Sewell Point lawsuit nears possible court date

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The group Concerned Citizens for Sewell Tract Preservation Inc. has raised \$100,000 and has joined a landmark 25-year-old environmental case that could make it to the U.S. Supreme Court. The suit involves the Sewell Tract, a 96-acre undeveloped plot in East Cape May whose origins date back to the 1950s. The acreage is the last undeveloped land in Cape May.

Thomas Brodesser and Philip

Robinson, who developed Village Greene in Cape May, purchased the Sewell Tract in 1951. In 1990, the land was conveyed to East Cape May Associates (ECMA), also owned by Brodesser and Robinson. They sought to develop much of the tract. As litigation has dragged on for decades, the state Department of Environmental Protection made an amelioration offer to allow ECMA to develop 20 to 25 acres of the tract, much of which is believed to be wetlands.

ECMA rejected the offer, calling it "illusory and illegal." As a result,

it has recommended its suit before Judge Christopher Gibson of Cape May County Superior Court seeking monetary compensation for a regulatory taking of the property by DEP with damages estimated now at \$100 million.

Concerned Citizens, a nonprofit corporation, is suing the DEP. Through its counsel, Tyler & Carmeli, and with the financial assistance of supporters, it began a program of litigation aimed at invalidating the DEP amelioration offer so that it cannot serve as a standby remedy in ECMA's renewal

of its condemnation case. Concerned Citizen's attorney George Tyler is a former DEP assistant commissioner and an environmental engineer.

In October 2014, Concerned Citizens subsequently briefed a motion to intervene in the pending trial between ECMA and the DEP. On Dec. 9, 2014, Gibson granted the organization's motion to intervene in the main Sewell Tract lawsuit.

Concerned Citizens now has equal standing with ECMA and the DEP in court, which means it has an officially recognized role in the outcome of this

case and the other two parties cannot settle it without involvement of the organization, according to Charlie Hendricks, president of Concerned Citizens.

The organization reached a goal of more than \$60,000 in pledges in the first two weeks of January 2015 and has raised more than \$100,000 since its inception in July 2014, according to Hendricks.

"It's amazing to think that private contributors have gotten together and

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West Cape May keeps taxes flat

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

WEST CAPE MAY — The borough's proposed 2015 budget calls for a zero increase for taxpayers, maintaining the same local purpose tax rate of 33 cents per \$100 of assessed value as last year.

The budget as introduced by Borough Commission uses \$372,000 in surplus funds, up \$72,000 from last year, or 24 percent. Available surplus was \$732,000, up \$92,446 from \$639,997 last year.

Salaries and wages in the budget total \$430,200, up \$17,450, or 4.23 percent, over last year. Debt service is \$105,000, up from \$92,700 in 2014, or 13.27 percent.

The amount to be raised by local purpose tax is \$1.4 million, virtually unchanged from last year on a total budget of \$2.2 million, down \$127,000, or 5.42 percent.

Rate of tax collections was 97 percent.

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Point seeks no increase in tax rate

By BETTY WUND
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT — The borough's proposed 2015 budget calls for no increase in taxes. Borough Commission reviewed the budget at a March 12 meeting.

The local purpose tax rate is 25.8 cents for each \$100 of assessed value, the same as 2014. The \$1.7 million budget is up \$38,000 from 2014.

The largest share of revenue, \$1.3 million, is from the local purpose tax. Salaries and wages total \$421,768, down from \$440,614 last year. The number of employees has decreased from 62 to 57.

A public hearing and budget adoption are scheduled for commission's April 9 meeting.

The Environmental Commission

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Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Lower Cape May Regional High School is staging 'Mary Poppins' as its spring musical. In this scene, Lexi Murry as Michael Banks and Allison Sekela as Jane Banks are less than enthusiastic about the arrival of their new nanny, Mary Poppins played by Brittany O'Connor.

Practically perfect in every way LCMR students staging 'Mary Poppins'

By JOHN ALVAREZ
Special to the Star and Wave

ERMA — As the final cold, gray days of winter draw to a close, many local residents will keep an eye out for the last snowflake or hail to fall from the sky. However, from March 19 to 22 in the Paul W. Schmidtchen Theatre at Lower Cape May Regional High School, audiences will be seeing something else coming down from above — to be more accurate, a person coming down from above who is practically perfect in every way.

LCMR will be presenting "Mary Poppins" as its spring musical. To get the musical was a daunting feat accomplished by second-year director/producer Corinne Ryan.

"It was very interesting to me because this was the first time the play was released and licensed to schools and amateur groups," Ryan said. "So we should be one of the first schools in New Jersey to stage 'Mary Poppins.'"

This accomplishment was one of many in the long tradition of musicals performed at LCMR, which has been important to many people in the area for decades.

"It's almost like a legacy because it's passed through families and generations," said Kelly Kennedy, a graduate from LCMR who, besides teaching dance at the school, spent the past 11 years either as an assistant choreographer or choreographer of the musicals. "The musicals here are something where students attending school now had their parents or even their grandparents

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Kim Royster/Special to the CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Jason Fazio portrays Robertson Ay and Brittany O'Connor plays Mary Poppins in Lower Cape May Regional High School's production of 'Mary Poppins.'

Simonsen says LTMUA should fund new officers

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — Lower Township Councilman Erik Simonsen is suggesting Lower Township seek a \$205,000 donation from the Lower Township Municipal Utilities Authority (MUA) to pay the salary of four new police officers scheduled to join the department this year.

At a March 16 meeting, he said Township Council had one month to trim a proposed 2.5-cent tax-rate increase from the 2015 budget. Simonsen said the MUA saved \$1 million last year and spent another \$1 million on infrastructure.

"They have also offered to help us get our rate down, and that's something I believe should be explored," he said.

Township Manager Jim Ridgway said the cost of the annual salary of four new police officers would total \$205,000.

"There's an opportunity, \$205,000, I assume that would bring us below a 2-cent increase. I'm guessing 1.9 or 1.8," Simonsen said.

Mayor Michael Beck said he did not support asking the MUA for funds.

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Wildwood Crest to fight fires in Diamond Beach

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

ERMA — In response to Diamond Beach residents' complaints that their fire insurance rates have doubled due to a poor rating of fire protection from the Insurance Services Office (ISO), an agreement has been struck to make Wildwood Crest Volunteer Fire Company the first responder to fires in Diamond Beach.

At issue is that Diamond Beach is served by the Erma Fire Company, located on the mainland at the county airport. Firetrucks must use the Middle Thorofare Bridge to reach Diamond Beach, but the bridge, constructed around 1940, can no longer handle the weight of a normal size firetruck.

As a result, heavier Erma Fire Company firetrucks must drive through Rio Grande,

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