

Fest

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She said the harbor is a prime location for commercial and recreational fishing, boating activities and attraction for tourists of Cape May, making it a big contributor to the local economy. According to Whitman, Cape May is the second largest commercial fishing area on the East Coast.

Since Harbor Fest began, the Nature Center has always kept the educational standpoint it exercises year round and provides activities during the festival, teaching children and adults the ecological and economical importance of the harbor. On Saturday during Harbor Fest, the Nature Center will have a large tent set up with an exhibit inside pertaining to commercial fishing. According to Whitman, the exhibit will highlight and focus on three species - squids, scallops and surf clams.

"This is our first year doing an exhibit this big," she said. "It's sort of like a version of the 'Deadliest Catch'."

The exhibit will provide information about the animal itself, its history in Cape May, its biology and of course, how to cook it. The focus on scallops ties in with another activity featured at Harbor Fest, which is the Scallop Challenge, where local Cape May restaurant chefs com-

pete for the best recipe and preparation of these seafood delights.

Whitman said she is also in the process of setting up an exhibit featuring historical photos of the harbor. She said anyone who is willing to display some photos in the exhibit is more than welcome to bring them by the Nature Center before the festival.

The Paddle for a Purpose presented by Aqua Trails Kayak Tours is another event the Nature Center has in store for Harbor Fest. Money raised from the activity will go to the 'Good Neighbors Fund,' which provides a yearly scholarship for children of U.S. Coast Guard personnel.

"They are our neighbors, and we want to help them out as much as they help us," Whitman said.

The Nature Center has been neighboring the Coast Guard Base and overlooking the harbor since 1991, when it was established following an effort to stop a proposed development project in the area, which would have created over 200 condominiums and an additional marina. Whitman said local citizens banded together in the late 80s and fought the process. They eventually received a grant from the Green Acres Program and purchased the 18 acres of property on the southern shoreline from the developer.



Above, a Blessing of the Water ceremony from last year's Harbor Fest. Above right, Harbor Fest as seen from the Nature Center of Cape May.

Local resident and chairperson of the city's Environmental Committee, Charlotte Todd had the idea to use the buildings already on the property for the Nature Center. As the main building, the staff originally used what is now the education hall, named after and dedicated to Todd. Next door to it was the Trucksess family house, which had been abandoned and needed a lot of work according to Whitman.

The members and volunteers of the Nature Center always had plans to renovate the Trucksess house for years because of the need for more space, and in the fall of 2007, brought the dream to fruition. They had raised money for five years and invested

\$400,000 into renovating the building, making it what it is today. This happened just after the New Jersey Audubon Society adopted the Nature Center in 1996. Several architectural and decorative donations were made as well, such as the mural in the gift shop, painted by artist James McLaughlin of Painted Pastimes. One of the most intriguing aspects of the renovated Nature Center, or Trucksess house is the O'Neill Tower, featuring a stunning panoramic view of the harbor. The tower was named after Jeannie and Michael O'Neill who made a very generous donation to the Nature Center's efforts.

"This truly is a community center," she said. "We couldn't survive without our volunteers and community support."

Whitman, the only full-time employee, said there are over 100 volunteers who help out with the Nature Center, running the gift shop, organizing events and teaching the classes and programs the center provides. Whitman said during the summer camp programs, there can be anywhere from 75 to 100 kids per day at the center, so volunteer help is always needed.

She said there are many more ideas and desires for the Nature Center. Future plans involve a new furnace and adding to the center's 14 roof-mounted solar panels. Whitman would also like a

new mascot for the animal center - an octopus. The center already has numerous fish and horseshoe crabs for educational programs, but she thinks a pet octopus would really complete the picture.

Whitman hopes the annual Harbor Fest, educational programs and nearby events will bring more attention to the Nature Center in the future. She said even though they've been in the same location for 20 years, there are still many tourists and even residents who have very little knowledge of its existence.

"I commonly refer to us as Cape May's best kept secret," she said.

Liquor

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their own alcohol. So they have no reason to sell it."

Clerk Elaine Wallace did research on the matter and found how much licenses sold for in other parts of county. The nearest business and municipality that sold a consumption license was the Bayshore Café in Lower Township. The license sold for \$450,000 in 2009.

The other license in Lower Township was for Gorman's Liquors and it sold for just over \$1.6 million in 2009; however, Wallace didn't know whether this included inventory as well because some financial information was not given. The other figures she received were from Dennis Township, where at least four years ago a consumption license sold for \$300,000 and a distribution

license with the minimum bid being \$700,000, sold for just over \$1 million.

When the referendum was done in West Cape May several years ago, Wallace said the minimum bids set for the borough were \$650,000 for the consumption license and \$750,000 for the distribution.

Burke said the economy has

changed a great deal since those figures were researched, and said the board should consider lowering the bids.

"I would think if we lowered it, it could give the impression that we were more serious about selling it," Geyer replied.

Geyer said, based on

Wallace's research, if it were left up to him he wouldn't lower the bid more than \$100,000 considering how much other licenses have sold for.

Kaithern said she agreed with Geyer on the matter. She said if you do lower it, it's a gamble because the borough might just get the minimum bid, when it could have been higher. She said it's possible there will be no bids again as well.

Kaithern said the board would take the next two weeks, before the June 22 meeting, doing research and

discuss more deeply the matter of selling the licenses and what the minimum bid should be.

Wallace said a resolution would have to be drawn up authorizing the bids when a final decision is made.

Before the discussion ended, Geyer asked what the money was stipulated for, when the referendum was voted on. Kaithern said it would be put in a trust fund dedicated to tax relief, which would hopefully be used over the next 10 to 15 years.

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Point

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the Environmental Commission on its Plan Endorsement committee. The state also has allowed them to put off a review of their recycling plan and complete it as part of a review of the Master Plan.

Commissioner John Henderson announced life-

guard tryouts took place on consecutive Saturdays, June 4 and 11. He said there was still concern about beaches where beach-saver reefs had been placed, which are too close to be safe for bathing.

"The beaches that will be open will be decided by next week," he said.

Henderson urged residents and visitors to be cooperative with beach taggers. He said pre-season sales of beach tags was 10 percent higher than last year.

Schupp said the EPA had conducted an inspection of sewer lines and found them to be in good condition. He said an energy audit of the firehouse had been completed.

Schupp said he and borough clerk/administrator Connie Mahon met with South Jersey Gas, which said it would start putting new gas lines in West Cape May in September, and the gas company is looking for interested customers in Cape May Point. Schupp said gas lines would be installed first on streets where there is the most interest in being gas customers.

"If you are interested you should apply," Schupp said.

During the public portion, one resident asked if anything could be done to improve the condition of Sunset Boulevard.

"I've spent thousands on suspension work and I was curious about others," he said.

Schupp said he knows the worst spot the resident referred to, saying, "When I drive over it I feel like I'm going to lose my fillings."

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