

Murphy promises better care for veterans on N.J.

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

WILDWOOD — Shortly before taking over a state that ranks worst in the nation in care of veterans, Gov. Phil Murphy, First Lady Tammy Murphy and their four children began inaugural week with an appearance Jan. 14 at the Wildwoods Convention Center for an event sponsored by a consortium of veterans organizations.

The ceremony was originally scheduled to take place across the street at the Vietnam Memorial Wall bearing the names of 58,300 veterans killed during the Vietnam War, but a 19-degree outdoor temperature moved the event indoors.

Joe Griffies, host of the Welcome Home Veter-

ans Show on WIBG Radio, thanked the Murphys for all the visits they made to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center military hospital in Germany while Phil served as ambassador to that country from 2009 to 2013.

Griffies said veterans need better care in New Jersey.

"We send them to war whole, we bring them home broken and then we turn our backs on them," he said.

Iraq veteran Jeff Cantor, who has served as a veteran adviser to the Murphys, said a recent study from veteransaid.org ranked all states and the District of Columbia on how well each takes care of its veterans. He said the study examined the economic environment, amount of state tax, military pensions, percentage of

veteran-owned businesses, veteran job opportunities, the cost of living index, housing affordability and quality-of-life issues such as Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits facilities, number of homeless veterans and number of VA health facilities.

"Out of all 50 states and the District of Columbia, New Jersey ranked No. 50 in the care and support of our veterans," Cantor said. "This is absolutely not an area where we should be at the bottom of the pack."

He said Murphy has a sense of urgency to take care of the state's veterans. The Murphys and their four children placed wreaths and flowers in front of a row of flags for service members killed in Vietnam, Korea, Iraq, the global war on terrorism and World War

II. Tammy Murphy said she and her husband spent their Thanksgivings visiting wounded warriors at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center.

Phil Murphy said the state's ranking of 50 out of 50 "is a bone in my throat."

"We're going to fix that," he said.

The memorial wall was a reminder of the awful toll of war but also the tremendous lifelong bond that is created among those who served, Phil Murphy said.

"We can never repay the enormous debt we owe those who have worn our nation's uniforms, but the least we can do is make sure that every vet has the help they need to transition back into civilian life and be successful," he said. "If we are to and achieve a stronger and

fairer New Jersey, it must begin by standing by those who stood by us."

He said veterans issues transcend political parties. Murphy said too many veterans lack jobs or struggle with mental illness or homelessness.

Col. Jamal Beale will be nominated to lead the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs as state adjutant general, Murphy said. He said Beale has more than 30 years of military service.

"We're going to create a new culture of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs," Murphy said. "That will begin by making sure that every New Jersey veteran qualifies for the benefits, especially health benefits."

He said there is no reason the state should define who

is or isn't a veteran any differently than the federal government, whether one served in the National Guard, the Navy or "wherever." The state must also more fully coordinate with the federal Department of Veteran Affairs, especially on health care, Murphy said.

Thousands of South Jersey veterans must travel to Philadelphia or Delaware for health care, he noted. AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center, City Campus in Atlantic City, announced a first-in-the-nation partnership with the VA for access to its services to prevent the need to travel out of state, Murphy said.

"We will ensure better outreach to veterans so more know about the benefits they earned and are qualified for," he said.

Erma woman ticketed in crash

ERMA — Police investigated a three-car crash at about 2:39 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 11, at Route 9 and Carol Avenue in Erma.

It was reported three vehicles were involved, with one vehicle sustaining airbag deployment. Upon police arrival at the crash scene, three vehicles were still in the

roadway. They were a Ford Escape, a Ford cargo van and a large box truck. Lower and Middle township police immediately shut down a portion of Route 9 between Shirley Avenue and Church Road to traffic during the investigation for safety.

The driver of the Ford Escape, identified as Britanni

M. Roach, 32, of Erma, was evaluated by rescue personnel and transported to Cape Regional Medical Center for further evaluation.

The crash investigation determined that the Ford Escape was traveling north on Route 9 behind the other two vehicles when it struck the Ford cargo van from behind, causing the cargo van to strike the large box truck from behind. Two of the vehicles were towed from the scene.

Roach was issued a motor vehicle summons for careless driving.

Beach Drive sidewalk

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200 homeowners, many who are summer residents, crowded Township Hall for a special Saturday meeting. No hands were raised at that time when then-deputy mayor Norris Clark asked the audience how many thought the sidewalk was a good idea.

"The project has been well thought out," Perry said. "We've worked with New Jersey DEP (Department of Environmental

Protection) to make sure it was environmentally sound and safe and that we were actually going to enhance those dunes to give us better shore protection at the same time as improving safety along the bayfront."

Perry said the project would be completed prior to summer.

In August, Township Council unanimously approved a \$2.8 million bond for the project, including a \$178,000 grant from the state Department of

Transportation. The project includes beach modifications, curb, sidewalk and drainage improvements on the west side of Beach Drive from Lincoln Boulevard to Fernwood Road and outfall pipe replacement at Washington Boulevard from Beach Drive to the outfall replaced in January 2013. Curb and handicap ramp improvements would be made on the east side of Beach Drive from Whittier Avenue to Emerson Avenue.

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Exhibit opens

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history so the same mistakes are not made over and over again.

CCA Executive Director David McKenzie said the Franklin Street School is what drew him to the organization. He said working with the city, the CCA was optimistic the school would be restored.

The exhibit has a poi-

gnant aspect with the passing of Mary Cordelia Bounds at the age of 104, two days before the opening. Bounds was a teacher at the Franklin Street School from 1937 to 1945. An interview with Bounds is featured in the exhibit.

The school was two buildings in one with an elementary school in front for black children and gymnasium in the back for the racially integrated Cape May High School. The exhibit notes there

was no physical connection between the two sections of the building.

"I thought we would have new books," Sara Bose Edgcomb stated in an interview for the exhibit. "The books came from the white school."

The books were well worn by the time they arrived at the Franklin Street School.

The school closed in 1947 when segregation was outlawed. The school later was used as a vocational school, a juvenile center, storage for the city and a hub for the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act.

With six large classrooms, the school was seen as ideal for meeting, performance and studio spaces, according to information in the exhibit. The county library systems will conduct a feasibility study to determine if Cape May's branch library could be moved into the school following restoration.

"Franklin Street School: From Segregation to Unification" is open to the public through April 15. Admission is free.

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