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District 1 legislators push for area's priorities

Assemblymen McClellan, Simonsen up for re-election along with new governor in November

By **JULIA DiGERONIMO**
For the Star and Wave

TRENTON — New Jersey's First Legislative District representatives have southern New Jersey's well-being on their minds as 2025 gets rolling.

Republicans state Sen. Michael Testa and Assemblymen Antwan McClellan and Erik Simonsen oversee District 1, which consists of all of Cape May and Cumberland counties and part of Atlantic County.

The trio ran together for office in 2019 and are in the midst of their third consecutive term. During recent interviews,

they said their priorities revolve around the unique aspects of the region rather than the state as a whole.

"You'll see the bills that we try to push forward are concerned with things in our area like the fisheries," said Simonsen, a former Lower Township Council member. "That's one of our major industries and we deal with tourism and hospitality, too. There are a lot of rural areas in our district that we worry about getting internet to or public transportation."

Both members of the Assembly have worked in their local school district — Simonsen is athletic director at Lower Cape May Re-

gional School District — which has helped them realize the importance of advocating for school systems.

"It gives us a different, well-rounded perspective of what we should be doing as a Legislature to support our kids and help our teachers," said McClellan, a former Ocean City Council and Board of Education member. "We need to give those dollars and cents to our school districts to make sure our kids have everything they need to be successful."

Environment, climate change
Environmental and climate



McCLELLAN



SIMONSEN



TESTA

lands and wild-life as well," Simonsen said. "When we pass or vote on bills, we're conscious of that."

Living in southern New Jersey has given the legislators front-row seats to the changing climate and rising sea level.

concerns are among the top priorities for District 1.

"Growing up at the bay and ocean taught us about the way our life down here relies on wet-

"This should not be a partisan

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Economy keeps growing despite 'soft' '24 season

County second only to Atlantic in visitor spending; up 3 to 4%

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

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — "We'll take 3.5 percent of \$7.7 billion," Diane Wieland said of the anticipated increase in tourism spending in Cape May County through 2024.

Final numbers have yet to be calculated, but the director of the county Tourism Department said the region saw a 3.5 percent increase through August and expects another annual increase in the 3.5 to 4 percent range.

She said Tourism Economics, the company that creates reports for the state, reported during the tourism conference held in early December that the county remained second only to Atlantic County in visitor spending (\$8.1 billion).

"That's not bad for us — they used to double what we are," Wieland said. "We've always been second to them, but about 24 percent of our visitors

go to Atlantic County, so it's good for us as an extension to create longer stays."

Wieland said the 2024 season was not a blockbuster but the region still had growth of 3.5 to 4 percent. She expects the same for 2025 barring a rapid reduction in inflation that would loosen up discretionary spending.

"We were concerned about having another soft season," Wieland said, "but they had us at an increase of 3.5 percent through August."

Wieland said the state and national economies, along with the all-important weather, would play a large role in the region's ability to continue in a positive direction.

She said the county saw a 4.1 percent increase through 2023, calling that "a little soft," and so asked in its tourism surveys whether people expected their spending habits to change for 2024.

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Mullock looking ahead to major issues of 2025

By **RACHEL SHUBIN**
For the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — After running unopposed and securing a new term, Mayor Zack Mullock is entering 2025 with energy and a fresh perspective on the previous year's accomplishments and plans for the new year.

"The last couple of years have been so strong and successful for our island, financially and tourism-wise, and the financial strength has helped us get so many important things done for our community,"

Mullock told the Star and Wave.

While well-known for its Victorian architecture, beaches, restaurants, theater and shopping district, Cape May has a lot going on behind the scenes.

From tackling significant issues such as a new water desalination plant to reinforcing the Beach Avenue seawall and addressing the affordable housing crisis, Mullock has a full plate for his new term.

"They're all opportunities, even if they're tough

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Frank Scott/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

A city for all seasons

Snow blankets popular sights in and around Cape May following a storm that began in the early hours of Jan. 6 and continued throughout the day. According to reports, Cape May led the way with 8.3 inches, followed by North Cape May with 7.6 inches and Cape May Court House at 7.5 inches. Due to an extended cold snap, snow remained on the ground all week.



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