

Caper Tigers top Red Raiders on the mat

Page A4



House of the week

B1



168th YEAR NO. 4 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2022 \$1.00

Lafayette Street Park in 'legal Rubik's Cube'

Mullock says contamination cleanup caused complicated issue with multiple moving parts

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Construction of the proposed Lafayette Street Park continues to be tied up in legal issues concerning deed notices and underground contamination on the site.

From 1853 to 1937, a manufactured gas plant on Lafayette Street burned coal to provide Cape May with gas for heating,

cooking and lighting. In the process, benzene, naphthalene and other chemicals were left underground.

Through a number of mergers, Jersey Central Power and Light (JCP&L) inherited the site that included the former Vance's Bar property, the city's dog park and property on St. John Street, all the future site of a city park.

At a Jan. 18 City Council meeting, Lafayette Street resident Ros

Johnson asked if any work would be accomplished in 2022 in constructing the park.

Mayor Zack Mullock said the project is still tied up in legal issues. He said the city is waiting for the Cape May Housing Authority to sign a deed notice.

Mullock said the state Department of Environmental Protection, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Housing Authority, JCP&L and the county are all

involved with the property.

City solicitor Chris Gillin-Schwartz said the project is surrounded by a "cloud of regulation."

"The marching orders I got from this council at the beginning of the year was do everything you can to push that forward regulation-wise," he said. "Council is looking at the things they can do physically — removing houses, removing impediments — the

physical things and preparing the grounds for it."

Gillin-Schwartz said the property has environmental restrictions due to its past use.

"In digging it up, you still have these lingering monitoring requirements because they put a cap on it. They essentially put a helmet, a protective layer on top of everything that was in

See Park, Page A3

COVID numbers fall dramatically across the county

By DAVID NAHAN
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — Active COVID-19 cases dropped dramatically from Jan. 14 to Jan. 21 in Cape May County, but the Department of Health announced eight more deaths attributed to the coronavirus.

On Friday, the department announced there were 1,499 active cases among residents in the county. That compares to 2,329 active cases the week before, a drop of 35 percent.

Officials had predicted a decline was coming because the rate of transmission was coming down. It was at 0.82 on Friday, according to covidactnow.org, which means the spread of the infection is decreasing.

Among the eight deaths were a 76-year-old man from Ocean City; two from Lower Township, a 57-year-old woman and 86-year-old man; an 85-year-old man from Avalon; and four from Middle Township, two women, ages 83 and 88, and two men, ages 82 and 86.

County officials also noted hospitalizations at Cape Regional Medical Center fell to 39 from a high of 54 on Jan. 10.

The higher number of cases this winter has been

attributed to the Omicron variant.

Among resident active cases, Middle Township is the highest with 385 followed by Lower Township with 349, Upper Township with 198, Ocean City with 160 and Wildwood with 110. Other active cases among residents include Dennis Township, 95; Woodbine, 45; Wildwood Crest, 42; North Wildwood, 36; Cape May 35 (plus another 32 among non-residents); Sea Isle City, 18; Avalon, 11; West Cape May, 7; West Wildwood, 5; Stone Harbor, 2; and Cape May Point, 1.

To get a vaccine, quickly and free of charge, go to <https://capemaycountynj.gov/226/Health-Department> or call (609) 465-1187.

Although the numbers have dropped dramatically after a rapid rise beginning in December, the 1,499 cases still are well above previous peaks during the pandemic.

"We pray the worst of this peak is behind us based on the recent news of cases coming down," said Cape May County Commissioner Jeff Pierson. But, he added, referring to the eight deaths, "this news reminds us of the importance of getting vaccinated and masking up when indoors, especially when we are around people who are the most vulnerable."



Provided by architect Michael Calafati

Architect Michael Calafati created this concept for the Franklin Street School, which is undergoing restoration and renovation for use as a branch of the Cape May County Library.

Slow going for Franklin Street School

Conversion into library means many bodies must sign off

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — With many agencies involved in financing reconstruction of the historic Franklin Street School to turn it into a new branch library, the process has been slow.

Architect Michael Calafati updated City Council on the progress of the project Jan. 18. He said the project is the product of a cooperative agreement between the city of Cape May and the county with funding from six sources.

He said the state Library Construction Bond Act awarded the project \$3.4 million, the state Historic Trust is contributing \$595,000 from

a grant awarded to the Center for Community Arts, the National Park Service has awarded \$500,000 by way of the African American Civil Rights Program and the city, county and the county library system each is contributing as much as \$2 million.

In 2019, Calafati completed a feasibility study on the building. He said it does seem the project is taking a long time to begin, attributing the delay partially to the number of agencies involved.

By the end of 2019, the city, county and the county library system committed funds for the project, Calafati said. At the beginning of 2020, a grant was sought from the state library fund, he said.

Due to the pandemic, the deadline was pushed off to June with announcements for the money awarded at the end of 2020.

The National Park Service grant was also announced at that time. Calafati began working through an approval process with the state at the beginning of 2021.

"There was a hearing by the New Jersey Historic Sites Council in June of last year that approved the project with some contingencies," he said.

Calafati said Mayor Zack Mullock and Councilwoman Lorraine Baldwin were part of a Zoom conference with the New Jersey Historic Site Council

See Slow going, Page A3

Hirsches sell Montreal Beach Resort after 55 years

Three generations of family spent life at Beach, Madison avenues

By RACHEL SHUBIN
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — After five decades of ownership, the Hirsch family is saying goodbye to the Montreal Beach Resort. The end of the era comes as the resort, Harry's Ocean Bar & Grille and the Wine Cellar liquor store have been sold to Madison Resorts.

"It was a hard decision but it was the right decision," said family spokesman Evan Hirsch, who is a senior producer with NBC News in New York City.

For 55 years, three generations of the Hirsch family have operated the resort and restaur-

ant at the corner of Beach and Madison avenues.

The legacy began with Harry and Sophie Hirsch, who left Poland seeking a better life in America. Brothers Joe and Larry Hirsch carried on the business and Jonathan Hirsch was food & beverage director. Cousins Sophie and Abbie Hirsch also worked a bit in the liquor store.

A family history

Unable to speak a word of English, in 1951 Harry and Sophie Hirsch arrived via a cargo ship in Philadelphia, where they settled in hopes of building a

life for themselves by establishing an egg and poultry delivery service. Harry Hirsch was also a skilled carpenter who worked various construction jobs, ultimately leading him to Cape May. In 1965, the beachfront property became available and they knew they had to have it.

"For my entire life, the nucleus of our family was located at Beach and Madison," Hirsch said. "In a very real way, it's part of our DNA."

They turned an empty lot into a 27-room family hotel, then ultimately a 70-room resort. When it was built, it boasted color television and air conditioning.

"Back then, it had a mini-golf course and now it has a beach club and an award-winning restaurant," Hirsch said. "It has grown dramatically, thanks to the blood and sweat of so many people, family and otherwise."

Hirsch said the new owner is keeping the entire staff on board and former guests can rest comfortably knowing they are in very caring, experienced hands.

"Now my dad can really, fully, actually retire, as can my uncle, without a giant oceanfront albatross hanging over his head," Hirsch said. "And my brother

See Montreal, Page A2



Provided

An old advertisement promotes the Montreal Resort Motel in Cape May.



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