



Lower faces Middle in boys hoops action

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House of the Week

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171st YEAR NO. 2 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8, 2025 \$1.00

Whitman leaving a legacy of successes

Nature Center director ready for retirement

By RACHEL SHUBIN
For the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — With her retirement date looming, Nature Center of Cape May Director Gretchen Whitman has been packing away her desk, stopping to admire “the Nicholas letter” that has been displayed on her desk since she received it in 2001.

The letter, written by then-4-year-old Nicholas Marinelli, reminded Whitman of a young attendee at the Harbor Safari event she hosted. In the letter, Marinelli asked Whitman to tell him more about sand fleas the next time he came to Cape May. Whitman reflects upon the letter if she’s ever having a tough day.

“He dictated [this] wonderful letter to his mom, and he drew me pictures,” Whitman said. “That’s what it is all about, creating a sense of wonder for children and having them be engaged in the environment, which will make a difference in the future. ‘They’re going to grow up and be leaders.’”

Whitman has worked at the Nature Center for the past 30 years, starting as a volunteer in 1995 and becoming the center’s director in 1998. While her time as director will come to an end in January, Whitman hopes to continue volunteering in some capacity, including tending to the gardens on the grounds.

“I became a part-time teacher and naturalist and helping with the summer camp [programs],” she said. “I always kid to every-



Rachel Shubin/For the STAR AND WAVE

Director Gretchen Whitman recently retired after 30 years at the Nature Center of Cape May, where she has overseen good times and bad times resulting in the current success of its many programs.

one, ‘I was a volunteer. Be careful, you might just [end up] running the place.’”

Leaving a job after a lengthy term, Whitman mulls over what it means to have a job, despite its challenges, that she can look back on fondly.

“There is a Japanese term called ‘ikigai,’ which means finding your passion, and I’ve been fortunate that I found my ikigai [within] my career,” Whitman said.

Passion fuels growth

In 1995, the Nature Center was adopted by New Jersey Audubon. Whitman

worked as a part-time director, along with part-time staff, with a primary focus on the spring and summer months, when field trips and camp took place.

“It really was a fledgling, small, summer-only center in the very beginning,” she said. “The first accomplishment [as director] was in 2005 when we did a major capital campaign to renovate the building.”

The run-down house was turned into the welcome center, allowing the Nature Center to expand its footprint. Now, the center has five buildings on its campus. “If you look at old pho-

tographs, the building was surrounded by phragmites, [so] we did a lot to fix up the facility and expand our programs to be more than just a summer place,” Whitman said. “Even though we do close in the dead of winter, we’re always doing things like programs for schools, after school and the library.”

Thirty years at a job allows one to witness the continued growth of programs, including many beloved community events such as Harbor Fest and the Monarch Festival.

“We like people to be able to come and be a part of our center and take ownership in it,” she said. “What’s wonderful to me is the next generation, the kids that come here are the children of parents who were original campers.”

The local community is an integral aspect of the success of the Nature Center. Whitman said it is why the center is free for all guests.

Located just steps away from the Nature Center, the U.S. Coast Guard Training Center is part of the community.

“We’re very involved in the community, with partnerships with our neighbor, the Coast Guard,” she said. “We’ve always worked closely with them, including the Good Neighbor Fund, which provides free weeks of camp to Coast Guard-dependent children.”

In addition to the fund that Whitman helped establish, the Nature Center offers its \$3,000 Randy

Point swears in first all-woman governing body

Geiger, Yunghans join VanHeeswyck on dais

By RACHEL SHUBIN
For the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT — Cape May Point now has its first all-female Board of Commissioners, featuring incumbent Anita VanHeeswyck along with newcomers Suzanne Yunghans and Elise Geiger.

Former commissioner Catherine Busch was two votes short of retaining her seat in the 2024 election, and former mayor Bob Moffatt did not run for reelection.

“Thank you to everyone for allowing me to do this [job] for the past 12 years,” Moffatt said. “I’m really going to miss everybody.”

During a meeting Jan. 2, VanHeeswyck thanked Moffatt and Busch for all of their work while serving for the past several years.

“It’s been wonderful working with you, Catherine, and sad this era is past,” VanHeeswyck said. “Thank you so much for all you’ve done for us.”

VanHeeswyck presented both Busch and Moffatt with special journals.

“Bob, early on, you gave me a saying from Eleanor Roosevelt, and I think it’s so appropriate, so I want to

read it now,” VanHeeswyck said. “It applies to everyone who has been in elected office. ‘Do what you feel in your heart to be right — for you’ll be criticized anyway. You’ll be damned if you do and damned if you don’t. That’s the hard part of the job.’”

She said that is the hard part of the job.

“I think in Cape May Point, we all have a sense in our heart of what we’re doing is right,” she said.

Residents also had the opportunity to thank the outgoing mayor and commissioner.

“Thank you, Bob and Catherine, for all the hard work they’ve done over the last few years,” resident Sandy Allison said. “It’s not an easy assignment, but you both have done a great job, and I’m going to miss both of [you].”

Administrator Ed Grant thanked Busch and Moffatt for allowing him to serve during their administration.

“I think both of [you] did an outstanding job and should be congratulated,” he said. “We loved working with you.”

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Barr happy to serve area at county level

By DAVID NAHAN
Cape May Star and Wave

OCEAN CITY — Bobby Barr felt he had a seamless transition from representing a single community as an Ocean City councilman to representing 16 towns as a member of the Cape May County Board of County Commissioners.

He said nothing surprised him because he has worked at all levels of government and has interacted with county officials through his career.

“I was mostly familiar with how it all worked. There were a few things I had to learn ... but not much,” he said in a recent interview with the Sentinel.

A lifelong resident of the northernmost barrier island in the county, Barr served as Fourth Ward councilman from 2016 to 2023. He resigned when he was appointed to the county board in August 2023 after Commissioner E. Marie Hayes was appointed county surrogate. He ran unopposed that fall to fill the remainder of her term.

Although the 16 towns that comprise Cape May County are fairly diverse —

with the densely populated barrier islands and the more rural communities on the mainland — Barr said they all face a number of similar issues including a lack of affordable housing and veterans housing, budget issues and dealing with the state.

He said Ocean City holds a special place in his heart because it’s the only place he has ever lived, except for six months during a college internship, and he has a good relationship with the current council and Mayor Jay Gillian’s administration.

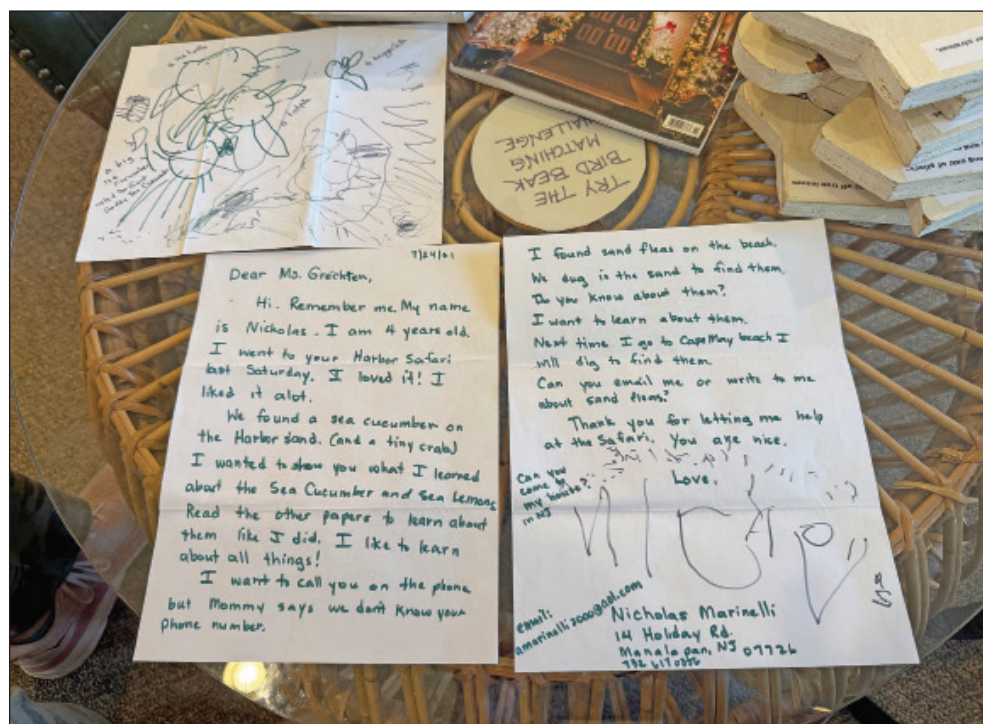
Barr said he’ll be sympathetic to concerns raised by his former colleagues, “but if another town needs something I’ll advocate for them just the same.”

Barr discussed a range of topics with the Sentinel.

Diversifying the economy

He would like to see the county further diversify its economy so “we’re not being so reliant on the tourism industry. That will always be the big 700-pound gorilla in the room. It will

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Rachel Shubin/For the STAR AND WAVE

Nature Center of Cape May Director Gretchen Whitman kept this letter on her desk that she received from a boy in 2001, demonstrating the depth of the net cast by the non-profit’s educational offerings.

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