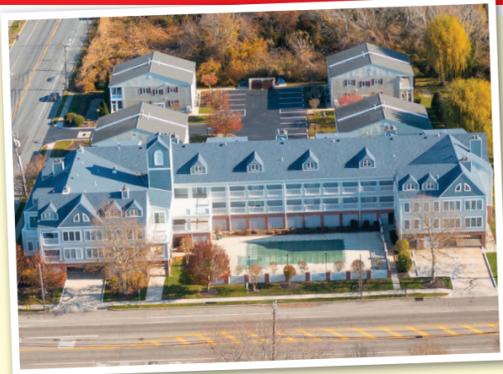




LCMR boys battle OCHS to double overtime

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House of the week

B1



168th YEAR NO. 5 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2022 \$1.00



Greg Bennett/Special to the STAR AND WAVE

A Victorian winter wonderland

A snowy morning Jan. 29 on Carpenters Lane in Cape May as viewed from Congress Hall. Snowfall on Cape Island and Lower Township ranged from 11 to 15 inches.

Borough discusses imposing a tax on short-term rentals

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

WEST CAPE MAY — The borough is in early discussions of the possibility of instating an occupancy tax on an increasing number of single-family homes being used for short-term rentals.

At a Jan. 26 Borough Commission meeting, Mayor Carol Sabo said the nature of the borough has changed with more than 200 single-family homes being used as short-term rental units.

The mayor said she wanted to explore the creation of an occupancy tax to offset the impact short-term rental houses have on the water system and municipal services.

“We have no income source other than our property taxes and even with increased building, it doesn’t bring in that much additional revenue to the borough,” Sabo said. “Our property taxes are pretty stable.”

Borough solicitor Frank Corrado said a state law allows any municipality to adopt an ordinance that imposes an occupancy tax

of between 1 percent and 3 percent on hotels and transient accommodations. He noted Cape May recently raised its occupancy tax from 2 percent to 3 percent.

Cape May amended an ordinance to include transient accommodations, Corrado said.

“But nobody is quite sure what a transient accommodation is and the principal issue that I’ve got to research and get back to you on is what constitutes a transient accommodation and whether these single-family home rentals are properly considered transient accommodations that can be subjected to this tax,” he said.

Corrado said he looked at the state statute and it was not entirely clear to him that it allows a municipality to assess the tax against single-family home rentals. He said there were some exceptions as to what constitutes a transient accommodation such as condotels.

There is language in the state statute that seems to

See Borough, Page A2



Jack Fichter (file)/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

The Cape May Planning Board denied a one-year extension of Cape Jetty LLC’s site plan approval to build a larger hotel on Beach Avenue.

Jetty Motel loses bid for extension of 2019 approval

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The Planning Board denied a request Jan. 25 from Cape Jetty LLC to extend site plan approval for construction of a new Jetty Motel.

The applicant’s site plan approval expired in August 2021.

At the end of a five-hour hearing in November, the city’s Planning Board unanimously voted against preliminary and final site plan approval for the construction on Beach Avenue, which would have featured a 243-seat restaurant and bar and stacked parking.

Attorney Bob Baranowski, representing the applicant, Cape Jetty LLC, said the board approved redeveloping the site in 2019 for a 61-room hotel. The new application sought to build a restaurant and bar open to the public that was previously only for hotel guests.

The plan was amended to reduce the hotel to 53 rooms and increase the height of the building to accommodate higher ceilings.

On Jan. 25, attorney Peter Chacianas representing Cape Jetty LLC said following the board’s denial

See Jetty Motel, Page A2

Sturdy celebrates century of service to the community

West Cape’s Reeves has spent 30 years fostering its growth

By DAVID NAHAN
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — Sturdy Savings Bank understands this market.

That knowledge and long-standing close ties to the local communities it serves is why, according to President and CEO Gerald L. Reeves, Sturdy is celebrating its centennial in 2022 and plans to continue its service to local residents and businesses for years to come.

“Plain and simple, something I’ve told my customers my entire career, we understand our customers’ situations,” Reeves said in a wide-ranging interview with The Sentinel last week. “If they have business needs, residential needs, consumer loan needs, if they want to do financial service transactions ... we understand. We know this marketplace.”

With 14 branches, Sturdy Savings is a mutual, not ripe for being gobbled up by a regional or national bank. That decision is firmly entrenched with its nine-member board of directors, all but one of who are natives or were raised in the county.

“My group of directors has never held an interest in that,” he said. “Sturdy Savings is by far the largest deposit-holder in Cape May County of people who live in Cape May County. Many people don’t know that.”

Being a mutual “means other banks can’t buy it. It doesn’t have stock that’s on the market. So, I can’t wake up tomorrow and find that someone has bought the bank, which does happen to stock-held banks on a regular basis,” Reeves said.

That was one aspect that attracted him to Sturdy back in 1991.

After more than a decade in the banking business working for Marine National Bank in Wildwood, a bank that had been sold to a bigger bank that was in turn sold to an even bigger lender, he learned Sturdy was looking to open a business loan department.

“I thought, ‘What is a good local bank that is well established, has a nice network of branches and is a mutual company?’ I thought of Sturdy Savings.”

He was a specialist in business lending at the time and learned that Sturdy was expanding into that market. With the bigger banks buying up smaller banks in the county, there were fewer opportunities for local businesses to get loans.

“I was a little frustrated because each time (Marine National) got bigger, the senior management was further away from Cape May County,” which meant its compassion for, and understanding of, the local marketplace was more remote, Reeves said.

The West Cape May native, who became president and CEO of Sturdy Saving in 2008, said being part of and knowing the unique nature of the market at the shore in southern New Jersey is what keeps the bank connected to its customers.

Attesting to that is the fact the three presidents of Sturdy Savings in the past 35 years all went to school in Cape May or Atlantic counties. Reeves is a graduate of Lower Cape May Regional

See Sturdy, Page A5

COVID cases continue to plummet countywide

By DAVID NAHAN
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — As fast as COVID-19 cases rose in Cape May County, they’re dropping just as fast, although the lagging indicators show six more residents’ deaths were attributed to the coronavirus in last Friday’s weekly report.

Active cases of COVID-19, attributed to the more contagious Omicron variant, quadrupled from about 250 cases around Thanksgiving to more than a thousand by Christmas, to 1,800 10 days after that and then topped out over 2,300 by mid-January, far higher than any peak period before during the pandemic since statistics

were kept in March 2020.

By the Jan. 21 report, active cases had dropped to 1,499 countywide and in the latest report, from Friday, Jan. 28, they were down to 1,050 as the rate of transmission continued to drop. It was at 0.73 Friday; any number below 1.0 indicates infections are declining.

Hospitalizations also have fallen since Jan. 10, the Cape May County Department of Health reported.

The six deaths reported Friday include a 94-year-old man from Ocean City, a 78-year-old woman and two men, ages 81 and 82, from Lower Township; a 79-year-old man from Middle Town-

See COVID, Page A2

Beach Safety seeks estimates to extend PA system

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — A public address (PA) system was installed from the cove beach to Convention Hall but the remainder of the shoreline to Poverty Beach is not covered by the system which is used to make announcements to beachgoers of unsafe swimming conditions or

approaching thunderstorms.

The city’s Beach Safety Advisory Committee is seeking to complete the PA system to Wilmington Avenue.

MetroSound Pros installed the first portion of the project at a cost of \$259,000. The second phase is more complicated. In phase one, speakers were installed on existing

utility poles. The phase two area lacks utility poles. The city’s former engineer said a Coastal Area Facilities Review Act permit from the state may be necessary to install poles in the beach, an added cost of \$50,000.

At a Jan. 24 Beach Safety Advisory Committee meeting, Councilwoman Lorraine Baldwin said local public address system

contractor Joe McLoughlin looked at the existing PA system and was putting together a specification sheet for phase two of the project to be put out to bid.

“That looks like it’s probably a next-year project by the time the bids come in,” she said. “You’re not going to be

See PA system, Page A4



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