

# Cape May VFW hosts 50 USCG recruits for holiday

By **DEANNA BROWN**  
For the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Operation Fireside, which allows U.S. Coast Guard recruits to spend holidays with host families during their basic training at the Coast Guard Training Center in Cape May, was initiated by the Red Cross in 1981.

The purpose is to provide a “home away from home” for recruits during Thanksgiving and Christmas. The American Red Cross Southern Shore Chapter in Cape May Court House is currently responsible.

Operation Fireside is not off-base liberty, but an official military community relations program.

On Nov. 11, Cape May VFW Post 386 Auxiliary members hatched an idea

to join in with Operation Fireside. It's been several years since the local post volunteered for this community event.

They contacted a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary who was familiar with the program and within 24 hours, the group joined the program.

The Veterans Home Association agreed to host 50 recruits and would work with the VFW Auxiliary.

Plans were immediately made to provide food on their arrival followed by a full Thanksgiving meal at noon.

A week before the event, the group learned it needed to provide transportation. By noon the next day, Fare Free Transportation said it would provide transportation, offering its last two buses and four drivers on

Thanksgiving Day.

As per Ken Ballan, Operation Fireside coordinator since 2017 for the Red Cross, as of the day before Thanksgiving, the Coast Guard's forecast was for a total of 547 cadets visiting host families and organizations.

The recruits would be hosted by about 95 families, four American Legion Posts and the VFW Post in Cape May.

All host families and organizations must be within 50 miles or a 60-minute commute from the Training Center in Cape May.

All 50 recruits came from “India-206,” a specific training company or group of recruits that undergo basic training together.

They arrived at the training center Nov. 19 and are set to graduate Jan. 10, 2025. They are



Provided

Cape May VFW Post 386 hosted 50 recruits from U.S. Coast Guard Training Center Cape May for Thanksgiving through Operation Fireside.

the only training group who will be spending both Thanksgiving and Christmas away from home.

The recruits came from 20 different states as well as Quebec, Canada and Colombia.

There were recruits from as far away as Hawaii and two from nearby Absecon and Fairlawn.

The Coast Guard forecasts a need for host families and organizations for Christmas for about 650 recruits.

The Elks Club of Millville has volunteered to host at least 200 recruits. About 70 other host families will accommodate another 200 cadets.

Host families are added on a first-come, first-served basis. Those who apply and meet the criteria are matched with recruits for the holidays.

The Red Cross is still in need of host families for an additional 250 recruits.

Those wishing to volunteer should email opfireside@redcross.org (attn: Ken & Linda) to make arrangements to become a host family

# Army Corps: Cape May Point beaches in great shape

By **JACK FICHTER**  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and state Department of Environmental Protection said that based on surveys from last year and this spring, the borough's beaches do not need sand replenishment.

If the borough needed sand, it would have been placed at St. Peter's beach since it is the only beach that does not have a revetment structure offshore, according to Deputy Mayor

or Anita van Heeswyk.

At a Dec. 5 Borough Commission meeting, van Heeswyk said the borough received beach replenishment four years ago through a back-passing operation.

“Although I was begging for extra sand to be added to the west end of the project, they can't do it because it was going to be used a little outside of the project area,” she said.

It's good news that the beaches do not need replenishment, van Heeswyk said.

“Things are really in balance right now and I believe it's from the large sand replenishment that they did at the Coast Guard base many years ago,” she said. “Cape May gets filled — they move sand to the Cove — and it is coming around here and filling our beaches.”

Evidence of that is that some people have complained they no longer can find pebbles on Sunset Beach because they are now buried under sand, van Heeswyk said.

“I have to say the Army

Corps has done a fantastic job for us,” she said.

In other business, the commission approved a new bid for the water main replacement and repaving of Ocean and Lehigh avenues between Yale and Harvard avenues.

Commissioner Catherine Busch said the state requested changes in the plans that required rebidding the project. The winning bid was submitted by Landberg Construction, of Dorothy, at a cost of \$447,707.

Commission authorized

the borough's contracted engineer to design a project for resurfacing half of Alexander Avenue, Cape and Surf avenues for a cost not to exceed \$36,175.

The borough renewed its shared services agreement for construction of office services with the city of Cape May until Oct. 31, 2028.

Commission approved an ordinance amending pet waste regulations. The public is required to immediately and properly dispose of pet solid waste deposited on any prop-

erty, public or private, not owned by that person.

The ordinance defines proper disposal as “placement in a designated waste receptacle or suitable container which is regularly emptied by the municipality or some refuse collector or disposal into a system designed to convey domestic sewage for proper treatment and disposal.”

Enforcement of the ordinance will be handled by Cape May police and the borough's code enforcement officer.

## Recycling rules

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of material and that large

containers encourage more and more recyclables to be picked up by

the city. “I don't feel that is the direction the city should be taking,” he said.

Some businesses place 20 feet of recycling up to 8-feet high in front of their businesses, Rauch said.

“Is the taxpayer responsible for paying for the operational costs of a business by collecting their recyclables?” he asked. “Obviously, that doesn't make any sense at all.”

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LOOK TWICE,  
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Rauch said 80% of property taxes in 2023 was paid by residents and 19% by businesses. He said the Taxpayers Association of Cape May is suggesting one 96-gallon container for residential and commercial recycling and anything beyond that must be picked up by a commercial hauler.

Meier said some larger businesses put out 300 to 400 gallons of recycling per week. He suggested multiple-day recycling pickup and a change of routes.

The city began recycling pick up in 2019 following receiving bids from commercial haulers that had increased by 300%, Meier said. He suggested the city should again seek bids from commercial haulers.

Dietrich said the bid the city received in 2019 to collect just residential recycling was \$548,523. Mayor Zack Mullock said Public Works is now collecting both commercial and residential recycling for far less cost than the commercial bid.

Bruce Carlino, an owner of Hot Dog Tommy's, suggested more recycling pickups during the busy 100 days of summer.

“This isn't about residential versus commercial, this is about you as an employer having employees that came to you about work conditions,” McDade said. “I think you'd all agree if you were a good employer you'd be concerned and try to address those especially if they were legitimate.”

She said the city's ordinance does not allow commercial recycling collection and that no commercial hauler would pick up recycling under these conditions.

Eric Prusinski, superintendent of Public Works, said the city assumed recycling collection in 2019 with two weekly pickups for the Washington Street Mall.

That was reduced to one

pickup per week when a merchant complained some businesses were getting recycling collection twice per week.

He said Stone Harbor has nine full-time public works employees and 20 seasonal employees. Cape May's Department of Public Works has three full-time employees, Prusinski said, which is why the department operates only one recycling truck.

He said public works has difficulty retaining employees.

Dietrich said both recycling trucks need to be replaced. Councilman Mike Yeager said he wanted to avoid any decision that would cause public works to increase its number of pickups for businesses. He said it would cost the city more in salaries and equipment and cause more worker's compensation issues.

Yeager said the city needs to get out of the business of picking up commercial recycling.

Meier said recycling “should be offered to everybody, it's an incentive not to put that tin can in the trash.”

Deputy Mayor Lorraine Baldwin suggested the formation of a task force to study the issue with residents, business owners, council members, public works employees, the city manager and a member of the Municipal Taxation and Revenue Advisory Committee.

Prusinski gave council members a copy of Wildwood's recycling ordinance, noting a private hauler handles all the town's residential and commercial pick up. City solicitor Chris Gillin-Schwartz said ordinances from other towns stipulate multiple dwelling units are responsible to supplement with additional refuse disposal when it exceeds the allotted city responsibility.

Meier suggested the

city allow four 96-gallon containers for businesses and multi-unit dwellings.

Prusinski said he is in favor of the regulations as proposed in the ordinance. McDade asked if the department could follow the regulations using its current staff and equipment with a once-a-week pickup.

He said the department could follow the guidelines if there were a limit on cardboard placed curbside. Prusinski said for cardboard, 96 gallons equals a stack 36 inches by 30 inches by 44 inches.

For a customer that exceeds regulations, Prusinski said the department would pick up the allotted number of cans and place stickers on cans that exceeded the limit.

“We don't need a task force; we all know at this table what the issues are. We're trying to find a compromise between a current ordinance that says there is no commercial pick up to one that says we've been doing this in practice, but may need to address the specificities around the parameters and boundaries to ensure that we are protecting the employees,” McDade said.

Gillin-Schwartz said if council did not adopt the ordinance at that meeting, it would be “dead in the water procedurally,” but a new ordinance could be introduced in January.

McDade said she, Meier and Dietrich could resume talking with Prusinski and his team and tighten up the ordinance.

Mullock said by Public Works handling recycling, the city has saved lots of money and served more people than the \$548,000 contract would have provided.

“I'm not taking this out of DPW's (Department of Public Works) hands; you guys have done an excellent job and also you've done it in a lean way with the people that you have,” he said.

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## Capestock lost \$125,000

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on the beach in the heat of the year made any sense of all.

Mayor Zack Mullock complained that the last time Capestock was discussed, “the only thing that made it to the paper was something like ‘city loses \$50,000 on concert.’”

He said that was not the whole story, but he understood the point. Mullock said some events produced flat revenue, some lost money and some are recreational activities.

The Tourism, Civic Affairs and Recreation De-

partment had a deficit in 2020 but today has a surplus of more than \$2.5 million, the mayor said.

“Yes, there are some lows and highs, no doubt, and prune some of the lows, I agree with that, but just to give a little rebuttal for anyone else listening, the department itself has been very well managed,” Mullock said.

In 2023, the city lost more than \$51,000 on a three-day concert event.

The city paid the bands \$37,000, spent \$6,350 on a sound system rental, \$6,100 for renting fencing and, including advertising,

the spent a total of \$63,737 on Capestock plus police overtime wages of \$2,919.

In 2023, Rauch said total expenses for Capestock were just under \$75,000. The revenue was another matter. There were 360 tickets sold in three days for a gross revenue of \$22,245. He said the estimated seating capacity for the concerts was 2,250 with a potential revenue of \$123,750. He said 72 complimentary, non-revenue tickets were distributed.

The break-even point required the sale of 1,294 seats while only 360 seats were sold.