

# CCA publishes compilation of Black community's oral histories

By RACHEL SHUBIN  
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — A collection of 60 oral histories recorded over 25 years has been neatly packaged in the book "Black Voices of Cape May: A Feeling of Community."

Produced by the Community History Committee of the Center for Community Arts, "Black Voices" represents the rich history of the African American community in Cape May, telling the stories of area residents. The book is available locally at Kaleidoscope and Cape May MAC (Museums + Arts + Culture), as well as through Amazon.

"History is the truth, and you put it down as the truth," said Emily Dempsey, one of the founders of the CCA. "People will understand what happened."

The CCA started collecting oral interviews to show the importance of the once-segregated Franklin Street School as a way of preserving the aging building.

"The state said we had to prove it was significant as a historic site, and a young lady at the time who was

the chair of CCA decided to do the first interview," Dempsey said. "She interviewed Elizabeth Allison, born in 1917."

While there was no recording of the first interview, the volunteer wrote down the conversation and fellow CCA volunteers picked up and began interviewing elders in the community. The state recognized the school as a historic building, preventing its destruction.

"We had talked about writing a book from the beginning, about being born and raised here," Dempsey said. "But we didn't think it would be enough."

Rachel Dolhanczyk, director of the CCA's history programs, said every year there would be conversations about compiling a book because of all the photos and information the group had collected.

"With everyone being a volunteer, with annual exhibits to do, the audio and cell phone tours, there was always something else happening," Dolhanczyk said. "At the end of 2019 at one of our meetings, we decided we were going to do this [book] and it became a

pandemic project." Throughout the worst days of the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers met on outdoor porches and gardens to plan the project.

"We did work throughout the pandemic, through heat spells and through all sorts of challenges," Dempsey said.

On a monthly basis, the volunteers worked through the 60 oral stories, which involved having the interviews transcribed.

"We, of course, thought everything was important," longtime volunteer and previous CCA staff member Yvonne Wright-Gary said. "[Our] one common goal was to get it done and we worked through it, and it was wonderful."

Having so many years of information available had its own challenges. Dolhanczyk said one interview could be as long as 25 transcribed pages.

"We wanted to include everybody to a degree," Dolhanczyk said. "Everyone wrote things, and Hope Gaines and Barbara Dreyfuss were the primary writers. "Once it was [formed], we started to read it and we would all sit around and toss

things back and forth, make changes and suggestions."

The formatting and editing process took most of 2021. In early 2022, volunteers picked out photographs to accompany the stories.

"Patricia Reid-Merritt, a professor at Stockton, agreed to review the manuscript," Dolhanczyk said. "We had a Zoom meeting with her and one of her suggestions was that we really needed an editor, which made total sense."

CCA brought Susan Tischler on board to help with editing. In late spring, the volunteers began work on the layout and graphic design of the book.

"The give and take is what strengthened us, our very diverse group," Dempsey said. "At the end, you couldn't let it go, it was the last piece of fruit. It was difficult, but amazing when I saw the book."

The diversity of the CCA committee is an important aspect of bringing groups together to work on the book project, she said.

"The committee is a combination of people who grew up in Cape May, those who came from other states,

black, white, different religions and ages," Dolhanczyk said. "We probably have 40 years between us all."

Dempsey said one of the most important parts of sharing the book and its history is emphasizing the role of the Black community.

"A lot of people who don't live here ask if there were ever African American people living in Cape May," Dempsey said. "Even people who lived here most of their lives don't know that we were here and made a serious contribution to the community."

"Black Voices" is a reference and the culmination of years of work and recognition of Cape May's Black community.

"We were definitely here," Wright-Gary said.

Sharing all the information in one place involved waiting for the right moment, Dolhanczyk said.

"The timing is right with the Franklin Street School

now being back under construction for restoration to become the county library branch," Dolhanczyk said. "And with the work being done on the Allen AME church."

It was very important to the CCA to share the history without interpreting it or adding in the committee members' voices, according to Dolhanczyk.

"[Segregation] was the law of the land [at the time], you knew the limitations and you were confronted," Dempsey said. "The hardcore segregation I don't remember. That happened in a lot of places, but it was here. We tell the story so people will know; it's to inform and move on."

The archives of photos and documents organized by the CCA will be housed in the new Franklin Street School library.

For more information, visit centerforcommunityarts.org.

## Sailors rescued

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communications with commercial vessels in the search area to aid efforts in locating them.

The Coast Guard launched multiple aircraft and cutters to search for the *Atrevida II*. Additionally, vessels from the U.S. Navy's Second Fleet as well as commercial and recreational vessel traffic within the search area contributed to the effort.

Hyde and Ditomasso were located by the crew of the *Silver Muna 214* miles east of the Delaware coast after waving a flag and their arms to get the ship's attention.

The *Atrevida II* was found to be de-masted and without fuel or power. The crew brought Hyde, Ditomasso and a pet dog aboard.

The men were in good condition and remained aboard as *Silver Muna* continued its transit to New York Harbor. They were brought ashore at Station New York for medical assessments and reunification with family and friends.

On Nov. 29, the 30-foot sailboat ran aground upon entering Rudee Inlet, near Virginia Beach, Va., and the Coast Guard had assisted in refloating the boat.

At a news conference Dec. 14, Ditomasso said the men were without drinking water for two days. A storm blew the boat off course and destroyed part of its mast, causing the vessel to drift further out to sea, according to Hyde.

"For this captain to find us out there was more than a needle in a haystack," Hyde said.

## Merger

Continued from Page A1

and commitment to their community," said Kevin O'Dowd, co-CEO of Cooper. "We look forward to working with our future colleagues at Cape Regional to build upon this tremendous legacy of service to residents of the Cape May region."

The combined health system will have:

- Two hospitals with more than 900 licensed beds
- Revenue exceeding \$2.2 billion annually
- More than 10,000 workers
- More than 900 employed physicians in three physician groups
- More than 450 APP
- More than 130 ambulatory locations across eight counties
- Six urgent care centers

"By expanding our current working relationship with the Cape Regional team, we will be able to bring additional advanced cancer and specialty health care services to local residents close to where they live," said Dr. Anthony Mazarrelli, co-CEO of Cooper.

The signing of the Letter of Intent is the first step in a lengthy process, according to the news release.

Cooper and Cape Regional will be working toward signing a definitive agreement in March.

Thereafter, the health systems will seek regulatory approval for the merger, which could take until the first quarter of 2024.



**Petty Officer 3rd Class John Hightower**  
U.S. Coast Guard and Fire Department of New York members welcome rescued boaters and their rescuers Dec. 14 to Coast Guard Station New York on Staten Island.

TIDES: Dec. 21-28, 2022				
DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
21	5:45	6:03	11:58	11:49
22	6:34	6:56		12:50
23	7:25	7:49	12:41	1:43
24	8:16	8:43	1:33	2:56
25	9:08	9:39	2:27	3:23
26	10:02	10:36	3:23	4:22
27	10:58	11:37	4:22	5:17
28	11:56		5:25	6:13

**MOON PHASES**  
New moon, Dec. 23 • first quarter, Dec. 30

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