



## HOUSE OF THE WEEK

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## MUSICIANS JAM AMID FESTIVAL IN CAPE MAY

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# Board to determine what events permitted at wineries

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — The County Agricultural Development Board (CADB) will decide in May what type of special events such as weddings and birthday parties can be held at wineries on preserved farmland.

Two wineries in the county are located on preserved farmland — Willow Creek Winery in West Cape May and Cape May Winery in Cold Spring.

The CADB held a hearing March 30 to receive comment from interested

parties on what should constitute a special occasion event for purposes of the Right-to-Farm Act.

At issue is that wineries want the freedom to host events that could include political fundraisers, business meetings and art displays.

In July 2014, the state approved S-837 establishing a pilot program permitting special occasion events to be conducted on preserved farmland at wineries provided that the gross income generated by the winery from all special occasion events conducted for the calendar year together account for

less than 50 percent of the annual gross income of the winery. In addition, the special occasion event must use the agricultural output of the winery to the maximum extent practicable to promote agricultural tourism and advance the agricultural or horticultural output of the winery.

Acting County Counsel James Arsenault said the hearing was taking place as the result of state legislation that asks county agricultural development review boards to take public testimony on the definition of "special occasion events" as the term is used in a state

statute and as it is to be applied to wineries on preserved farmland within Cape May County. Most of the comments for the CADB were submitted by letter the day of the meeting.

Hilary Pritchard, a West Cape May resident, said she has lived on Stevens Street for 38 years, calling it a residential street, not a county road. She said four farms are located on Stevens Street and she is concerned all of them would hold multiple weddings on any given weekend.

West Cape May Commissioner Carol Sabo said Borough Council submitted

a letter to the board addressing its thoughts on the matter.

"We would like to see an adherence to the narrower scope, the narrower definition of what a special occasion event is, specifically weddings, life celebratory events," she said.

Sabo said if any preserved farms are interested in moving forward following the passage of S-837, there is a requirement for a site plan review from the municipality.

West Cape May and Willow Creek

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## West Cape May group wants beer for festival

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

WEST CAPE MAY — Should the borough permit a beer garden at Wilbraham Park during the annual Strawberry Festival?

At a March 25 meeting, Borough Commission discussed a request from the West Cape May Business Association for a beer garden, something that would be a first in a borough, which was a dry town until it sold its first liquor license in 2011.

Borough Solicitor Frank Corrado said the borough has an ordinance that prohibits consumption of alcoholic beverages in public places including parks. He said if a beer garden were permitted, Borough Commission would need to amend the ordinance to offer a limited exception for borough events in which the purveyor complies with a requirement for insurance and bonding and is granted one-day liquor license. Corrado said the consumption area must be limited "so people can't just buy a beer and go

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## Cape May OKs \$17M. budget

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — City Council approved the \$17 million 2015 municipal budget in a 3-1 vote March 24 that includes a tax-rate increase of 1.3 cents. Councilman Shaine Meier voted against the budget after a motion he offered to move \$70,000 from legal costs to firefighter salaries failed to receive a second from other council members.

"Absolutely not," he said, when asked for his vote to approve the spending plan.

The tax rate would increase to 34.2 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

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## Rabbit season opens

Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

While the temperature made it feel more like Christmas than Easter, Matthew Eck, 9, and Kaylee Eck, 6, got a chance to visit a bunny and collect eggs March 28 at Freeman Douglass Park in Lower Township during the Department of Parks and Recreation's Easter egg hunt. See more photos on A2.

# Sheehan files whistle-blower lawsuit against Cape May City

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Former Police Chief Robert Sheehan has sued the city of Cape May for reinstatement and lost wages, claiming he is being unjustly punished for bringing an administrative matter to the Prosecutor's Office.

The law firm of Sciarra and Catrambone, of Clifton, announced March 25 it had filed a lawsuit on behalf of Sheehan. The lawsuit brings claims under the Contentious Employee Protection Act; commonly known as the whistle-blower law.

"This case is Exhibit A of a power-hungry mayor with henchmen disguised as a city manager and councilmen putting their improper and illegal practices ahead of common sense, good government and the city taxpayers," states a news release from Sciarra and Catrambone. "The history of these issues are now a matter of public record."

"Chief Sheehan is saddened by having to resort to this drastic step. But unlike the defendants, he will avail himself of the laws of our state. In the interim, he will continue to serve the citizens of Cape May with the dedication and integrity in which they are entitled," the release further states.

According to a complaint and jury demand filed in Cape May County Superior Court, Sheehan seeks to be reinstated as chief of police with all lost wages and benefits. He was paid an additional \$6,000 per year as chief over his current salary as captain.

According to the complaint, Sheehan was correct in placing the issue of Lt. Clarence Lear's alleged misuse of comp time under the investigation of the county Prosecutor's Office. It states Sheehan followed proper procedure handling an

administrative investigation of the comp time issue.

The complaint states City Manager Bruce MacLeod and City Solicitor Tony Monzo wanted to take disciplinary action against Lear without Sheehan's involvement.

On Nov. 11, 2014, Monzo sent a letter to First Assistant County Prosecutor Robert Johnson noting Sheehan had questioned whether the city had the authority to conduct an internal affairs investigation without oversight from

See Lawsuit, Page A4

## Backers: Reinstate Sheehan as chief

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — With a crowd of supporters for Police Capt. Robert Sheehan expected to exceed the seating capacity of City Hall Auditorium, City Council's March 24 meeting was moved to Convention Hall. The meeting had plenty of drama, including standing ovations, booing from the audience and council seated on stage under the same lights that have illuminated jazz singers and rock bands in Convention Hall.

More than 30 police chiefs from as far away as Bergen County drew a standing ovation when they entered the auditorium. The ovation continued when Sheehan, Cape May's former police chief,

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