

'Pipe bomb' report forces evacuation on Washington Street in Cape May

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Police responded to a report of a device that appeared to be pipe bomb at 4:13 p.m. June 20 at

Cape May Riggins service station on Washington Street, but ultimately found it to be harmless.

Fire units were dispatched and the Atlantic City Bomb Squad was summoned to the scene.

According to Cape May Riggins owner Barney Linn, the incident started when a customer arrived with an older model Dodge Durango complaining of a rattle.

"My two mechanics put it on the lift and found the rattle was a piece of garden-variety galvanized plumber's pipe a foot-and-a-quarter long that was capped on both ends with standard plumber's caps," he said. "It was very, very rusty."

He said there were no wires attached to the pipe, which rattled when moved.

He said the customer told the service station's manager, Jackson Beard, that he had been in a dispute with a neighbor after draining his swimming pool into an adjoining lot.

"They were musing perhaps this was an attempt to scare him," Linn said.

The owner of the Durango called Cape May police, according to Linn. In the meantime, Linn picked up the pipe, crossed Washington Street and placed it in an empty lot behind the Wawa market.

Police closed Washington Street, set up a command center in the parking lot of the Dry Dock restaurant at Pittsburgh and Texas avenues and evacuated the Wawa market at 4:40 p.m.

Additional buildings were evacuated near the Riggins station at 5 p.m. The Lafayette Street-Route 109 Bridge was closed on both the Cape May and Lower Township sides, with traffic rerouted to the

West Cape May Bridge.

Linn said he closed the service station and walked to the Dry Dock parking lot.

Mechanic Ed Fennimore said onlookers were moved back one more block before the Atlantic City Bomb Squad arrived. He said the bomb squad shot off one end of the pipe at about 6:45 p.m. and found it contained marbles.

A Sheriff's Office K-9 unit was brought to the Riggins station to search the Durango, said Fennimore. He said the owner of the vehicle was embarrassed by the incident.

According to a Cape May police news release, the scene was cleared at 6:56 p.m.

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MUA dissolved

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nothing wrong with the MT-MUA, there was the duplication of both professionals and employees and it made sense to consolidate.

Dissolving the MTMUA took much work, Hornik said.

"We had a big political battle. We had to go to the Local Finance Board to get approval and we did what we had to do, which was what was best for the township," he said.

A difference between Lower and Marlboro townships may be the manner in which its Township Council votes. Lower Township has been plagued with 3-2 votes on most recent issues, with independents on council casting three positive votes and two Republican councilman casting two "no" votes. A majority of council, a total of four votes, would be needed to start dissolution of the Lower Township MUA.

That was not a problem on

Marlboro Township Council. Hornik said every Marlboro Township Council member voted to dissolve the MTMUA.

"We had three Republicans on council and two Democrats, and everybody did what was best for the town," he said.

Marlboro Township merged the water/sewer operation with its public works department.

Hornik said there was duplication of efforts between the township and MTMUA with engineering, public works and the tax collectors office.

"We had the personnel," he said.

Marlboro Township raised water rates slightly three years after the dissolution due to the fact it purchases 75 percent of its water from another municipality, which raised its bulk rates.

"Our water rates in Marlboro are still lower than all our surrounding towns," he said.

He summarized the dissolution of the MTMUA as a "huge

success."

Marlboro Township saw an additional benefit from the dissolution of the MTMUA. More than \$5 million in escrow at the MTMUA for bond offerings was made available for capital improvements and tax relief, Hornik said.

Revenue bonds for a municipal utilities authority are backed by the ratepayers' payment of their water and sewer bills. Due to that fact, an MUA must keep 10 percent of any bond in escrow that cannot be used for other purposes, he said.

For townships, general obligation bonds are backed by the taxing authority of the local government, so no money needs to be in escrow because people pay their taxes and if not, a lien can be placed on their home.

Hornik said that when the MTMUA's debt was converted to general obligation debt, it freed up nearly \$6 million.



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School ruling

Continued from Page A1

"What we're striving for is to get to somebody with common sense," Wichterman said.

Lower Township Mayor Michael Beck said that when the case is over, he intends to sue Cape May for the revenue from five parking meters so the township can recoup the monies it has spent on legal fees.

"Everything that we have said so far has come true," he said. "Nothing that they have said has, and here we go, we're going to spend more money."

Beck said Cape May would not win a change in the funding formula and all it was accomplishing was aggravating the relationship between the two towns. He said he hoped at some point Cape May would recognize it cannot succeed in changing the funding formula and realize they're "throwing good money after bad."

Janet Pitts, a member of a Lower Township committee that wrote the original response to Cape May's initiative, said she was thrilled with Hesper's decision. She said she believed it backed up a decision in Seaside Park last year that had a similar outcome.

"I believe it states that this

cannot be resolved and should not be resolved through the Commissioner of Education. It's beyond his purview and could only be changed by a legislative remedy," she said.

Since 1975, only one regional school district formula was changed, said Pitts. Last year, Commissioner of Education Chris Cerf reduced North Haledon's yearly share of the Manchester Regional School District's budget by \$400,000, with two neighboring towns making up the difference.

North Haledon was not permitted to withdraw from the district because it would have disturbed the racial balance of the school.

Pitts noted that when the Lower Cape May Regional School District was created in 1950, there was only a 1,000-person difference in the population between Cape May and Lower Township. She said Cape May has not grown at all, with a population of 3,007 in 1950 and 3,007 in 2010.

Pitts said Lower Township has grown from 3,700 residents to almost 23,000 residents. She questioned the number of families with children placed in Lower Township by the county

Board of Social Services.

Beck suggested the cost of educating those children should be paid by the county "so everybody gets a fair share based on property values."

Last month, Cape May requested that state Sen. Jeff Van Drew pursue a change in the formula for the number of members representing the city on the Lower Cape May Regional Board of Education.

Wichterman said the number of members on the school board has not been changed since the 1950s, when the formula was based on the number of children sent to the school.

"So right now we are putting about 5.4 percent of the children in the school, we're paying about 35 percent of the cost and yet we can't even get a second on a motion because we only have one member on the board," he said.

Wichterman said he sent a letter on behalf of council to Van Drew requesting a change in the formula, noting Lower Township would still have the majority of members on the school board. Wichterman said if Cape May were paying one-third of the cost of the school district, it should have one-third of the members on the board, translating to three members on the nine-member board.

"We received a letter back from the senator saying because Lower Township doesn't have any interest in pursuing this, he's not going to do anything," he said.

Wichterman said Lower Township obviously had no interest in pursuing a change in the school board but that did not make it correct.

"If we're going to be paying as much as we're paying to keep that school going, we should at least have something to say about how it's going to be run, and that is not the case right now," he said.



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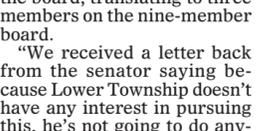




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