

County tax rate to rise more than half-cent in '18

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — The Cape May County Board of Chosen Freeholders introduced the 2018 county budget Jan. 23 calling for a rate increase of more than a half-cent.

Freeholder Director Gerald M. Thornton delivered his annual Budget Message that highlights the spending plan for 2018.

Preparing the budget is one of the most important documents used to govern all facets of county government," Thornton said. "The budget serves as the blueprint that ensures we are addressing the needs of our residents, living within our means and maintaining the quality of life Cape May County residents expect and we work hard to maintain."

The total budget for 2018 is \$152.6 million, a 4 percent increase over the 2017 spending plan.

"This increase will enable the county to maintain

essential services as well as prepare for substantial capital projects for improvements in county infrastructure," Thornton said.

The tax rate for 2018 will rise .6 cents to 22.47 cents per \$100 of assessed property value.

The county is expected to raise \$112 million in support of the budget.

"The county was able to generate surplus of over \$11 million, which pushed the total surplus over \$20 million for the first time in several years. The county increased the surplus anticipated in the budget to \$10.3 million, which is 50 percent of the available surplus. This is consistent with the county's policy," he said.

Thornton said the budget took senior administrative staff months of research, coordination and work to complete.

"They have created a

document that best reflects our mission to provide services to our residents and invest in our future. They are sensitive to the needs of our most venerable and underserved population and that is reflected in this budget," he said. "They understand this board's continued commitment to our constituents and the need to remain within the state-mandated cap. Their job does not end with the adoption of the budget. They carefully monitor spending throughout the year to ensure we remain on track and continue to be fiscally responsible to the taxpayers."

Thornton said the county is working on many fronts to deal with the issues that are hurting families.

"Renovations at the courthouse will provide for an extended drug court, staffing and training has been added to the Prosecutor's Office

and the Department of Social Services is at the end stages of being reorganized to better identify and assist those in need," he said.

"Cooperation with local organizations has been ramped up to provide warming shelters, food pantries and clothing for those in need. The Homeless Trust Fund is generating funds to address and prevent homelessness in the county. The Office of Emergency Management has revamped the Code Blue program to enable each municipality time to focus on providing shelter in the event of severe weather conditions.

"This board takes pride in the accomplishments and improvements made over the past several years. This is our home and we work hard to provide the best opportunities for our residents. Infrastructure, public safety and health and human services are

paramount in our spending plan."

He said the freeholder board is continuing to bring new jobs and economic opportunities to the county. "Public safety is always in the forefront. Two major construction projects will come to fruition this year," he said, citing the 85,000-square-foot jail scheduled for completion in May and the central dispatch system.

"Central dispatch and communication within Cape May County for emergency purposes has been an ongoing concern," he said. "The county central dispatch project is nearing completion. The inter-local agreement with Lower Township has proved to be a cost-effective and efficient model to provide 911 services throughout the county."

The project consists of a central dispatch facility that includes a renovation to the

Lower Township Police Department. The construction was completed in phases and the contractor is currently working on Phase 3.

The Emergency Management Center contains 16 dispatch consoles, a dispatch training room, command room, conference room, administrative offices, a locker room and kitchen. Security features such as cameras and card access units are being installed. The equipment is being assembled on the dispatch consoles.

"The Lower Township Police Department is on track and all team members are anxiously awaiting the completion of this innovative project," he said.

Thornton said the budget "will provide the ability to keep costs low while tackling necessary and important projects that will improve our community both this years and in our time ahead."

Lower 'Cop Stop' planned at North Cape May Wawa

ERMA — The Lower Township Police Department will be hosting a "Cop Stop" from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 13, in the Wawa at 3719 Bayshore Road in North Cape May.

Pt. Eric Coombs will answer questions or listen to comments citizens may have concerning the operations of the police department.

Literature on various community projects and

law enforcement opportunities will also be available. The "Cop Stop" program is a setting where police officers are available to interact with residents of the community in a relaxed atmosphere.

Business owners who are interested in hosting such an event are encouraged to speak with Coombs or may contact Lt. John Chew at (609) 886-1619, ext. 114, to discuss the program.

Old police car takes LEAD in drug fight



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE
Lower Township police donated this old police cruiser for use in the school's Law Enforcement Against Drugs program.

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

COLD SPRING — It's known as the "LEAD Car," and while it looks like it could have been the pace car for the Indianapolis 500, it's on a different course.

LEAD stands for Law Enforcement Against Drugs. The car made its first appearance Jan. 23 during a Lower Township Board of Education meeting. Superintendent Jeff Samaniego said an old police car was donated by the Lower Township Police Department and dropped off at Eddie's Auto Body.

"The idea was to fix up this car to bring drug awareness to not only our schools but our community," Samaniego said, adding that Officer Eric Coombs and Officer Jen Anzelone run the school's LEAD program.

Board member Steve Lewis, of Eddie's Auto Body, and

his wife, Heather, made a donation and commitment to make the former police car very special for the district, he said.

"We want to make this car stand out. We want to educate our kids against drugs and we want to send a message to the community," Samaniego said.

Lewis said restoring the LEAD car was about a six-month project. He said part of the restoration, besides the fluorescent green paint job, was installing new fenders and bumpers. Initially the project was just to paint the decommissioned police car, but the project took on a life of its own. Lewis said he asked if the car could be left at the body shop for a while. He said the car was made a priority in order to get it finished on time.

Lewis said the car would be presented to the police department on a future date.

Villas man faces drug charges

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — Villas resident Richard Johnson was arrested Jan. 25 and charged with distribution of a heroin. This arrest was the con-

clusion of a cooperative investigation between the county Prosecutor's Office's Gangs, Guns and Narcotics Task Force and the Lower Township Police Department Detective Division.

According to a news release, Johnson, 36, was arrested during the execution of a court-authorized search warrant at his home on Rose Lane. Seized during the search were distribution amounts of heroin, police said. Also found was a weapon, specifically a medieval type of flail. The warrant was a result of an investigation regarding the suspected distribution of heroin from the residence.

Johnson was charged with distribution of a controlled dangerous substance (CDS), possession of a CDS, unlawful possession of a weapon, possession of a weapon for unlawful purposes, possession of a hypodermic needle, certain person not to have a weapon, possession of weapon during a CDS offense, possession of drug paraphernalia, destruction of evidence-disorderly persons offense and obstruction. He was lodged in the Cape May County Jail pending court proceedings.

TIDES : Jan. 31-Feb. 7, 2018

DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
31	7:31	8:01	12:52	1:46
1	8:22	8:52	1:46	2:36
2	9:11	9:43	2:39	3:24
3	10:00	10:33	3:32	4:13
4	10:48	11:25	4:25	5:01
5	11:38		5:19	5:50
6	12:18	12:31	6:16	6:41
7	1:14	1:27	7:16	7:34

MOON PHASES
Last quarter, Feb. 7 • new moon, Feb. 15

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