

# Cape May Star and Wave



## Lower grapples with archrival Middle in playoffs

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## House of the Week

B1



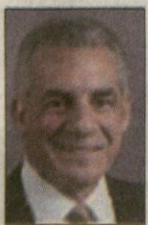
171st YEAR NO. 8 CAPE MAY, N.J. Serving America's National Historic Landmark City WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2025 \$1.00

## CapeGOP backs Ciattarelli in N.J. governor's race

### Donohue: Ex-assemblyman respects the county process

By DAVID NAHAN  
Cape May Star and Wave

RIO GRANDE — The Republican Committee of Cape May County has thrown its endorsement to gubernatorial candidate Jack Ciattarelli, whom it said respects the county convention process. The endorsement came during the CapeGOP meeting Feb. 5 at Cape Square Theaters in Rio Grande, Middle Township. Ciattarelli, a businessman who served in the Assembly's 16th District from 2011 to 2018, lost a close election to incumbent Democrat Phil Murphy in 2021, 51 percent to 48 percent. Murphy, finishing his second term, is not eligible to run for a third.



Ciattarelli

housing instead of forcing random numbers on every municipality," he said. Overall, he added, he expects Ciattarelli would focus on economic issues that face everyone in the Garden State.

"Jack has said he will create an office much like the federal Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to identify how to scale back spending in Trenton and prioritize economic relief for families and small businesses. I would love to see that happen," Donohue said.

The chairman said hundreds of GOP committee members, scores of Republican elected officials and dozens of GOP activists and supporters from across the state crowded into the theater to vote on endorsements.

He said the vote was unanimous for Ciattarelli for governor, Erik Simonson of Lower Township and Antwan McClellan of Ocean City for re-election to the state Assembly, Rita Rothberg for county clerk and Andrew Bulakowski and Bobby Barr for re-election as county commissioners.

"This is a tremendously strong ticket and any state-

See Ciattarelli, Page A3

## Wildwood Crest man charged with murder

WILDWOOD CREST — A Wildwood Crest man was charged with murder Feb. 13 in the shooting death of man the day prior inside a borough home.

Cape May County Prosecutor Jeffrey H. Sutherland and Wildwood Crest Police Chief Robert Lloyd announced the arrest of Carmine Neri, 63, who was charged in the slaying of Joseph Falciani.

Authorities said officers responded to a residence on East Cresse Avenue about 3:46 p.m. Feb. 12 following the report of a shooting. Upon arrival, officers made contact with the 911 caller, who stated that the shooter was inside, according to officials.

That's where officers encountered Neri standing in the front living room. Officers secured a black and silver handgun, allegedly observed in Neri's back right jeans pocket, and took him into custody.

Officers discovered Falciani lying on his back

at the top of a staircase with an apparent gunshot wound to the chest. Life-saving measures were attempted but were unsuccessful, and Falciani was pronounced dead at the scene, authorities said.

Detectives from the Cape May County Prosecutor's Office and Wildwood Crest Police Department initiated an investigation, including witness interviews, forensic evidence collection and the execution of search warrants, police said.

Witness statements from two individuals present at the time of the incident alleged an argument between Neri and Falciani escalated to the second story of the residence.

A single gunshot was heard, and witnesses discovered Falciani lying at the top of the staircase while Neri held a firearm. Additional witness testimony and forensic

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Frank Scott/For the STAR AND WAVE

Lower Township Historic Preservation Commission Chairwoman Pary Tell, playwright Stephen Larsen, Janis Washington White, Shirley Wilson, Wanda Wise Evelyn, cemetery caretaker Rudy Von Coln, filmmaker Tim Millaway and assistant producer Tom Coyle discuss the documentary 'Whispers from the Forgotten' after its screening Feb. 15 at the Cape May library.

## 'Whispers from the Forgotten'

### Documentary on local Black cemetery screened in Cape May

By RACHEL SHUBIN  
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Cemeteries tell a silent story, and Tim Millaway's documentary "Whispers from the Forgotten" uncovers the history of the Union Bethel Civil War Veterans Cemetery in Lower Township.

The documentary's prime focus was the significance of Black history in the cemetery. It made its Garden State debut on Feb. 15 at the Cape May branch of the Cape May County Library in the former Franklin Street School. The viewing room was packed, and the audience learned the untold stories of the 19th-century community members of Cape May and Lower Township.

The 33-minute film featured interviews with Lower Township Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) Chairwoman Pary Tell and descendants of community members buried in the cemetery, including Janis Washington White and Wanda Wise Evelyn of Rio Grande, Emily Dempsey of West Cape May, and Shirley R. Wilson of Wildwood.

The documentary starts with the story of the Rev. Edward Turner, the first community member buried in the cemetery in 1836. It explains that the cemetery was abandoned as members moved north to join the Whitesboro and Cape May communities.



Frank Scott/For the STAR AND WAVE

Janis Washington White, Shirley Wilson and Wanda Wise Evelyn, who are descendants of some of those buried at the cemetery, take questions from the standing-room-only crowd following the screening at the former Franklin Street School.

Another critical aspect the documentary informs the viewer about is the 16 Civil War veterans buried there.

Fifteen members served in the U.S. Colored Troops and one in the U.S. Navy.

White, Evelyn, Dempsey and Wilson recall their descendants throughout the documentary, going back several generations.

White explained that her great-great-grandfather was buried in a grave mislabeled on the headstone as James Standsbury. After 100 years, her father and older brother had his headstone changed to correctly read James S. Washington.

Dempsey discussed how she tagged along with her father and grandfather when they cleaned the headstones.

A strength of the documentary was its involvement of key community members and the photos, including the conditions of the gravestones, shown during the interviews.

After the screening, Millaway said the documentary was meant to be simple after he interviewed cemetery caretaker Rudy Von Coln and Tell, but it expanded when a Facebook post revealed there were still descendants of those buried living in the community.

The film has been submitted to film festivals, and another screening is scheduled for June 24 at a library in Cherry Hill.

Viewers will understand how various groups tried to maintain the cemetery. But it was not until the Lower Township HPC was revived in 2017 that they became stewards in charge of caretaking. Von Coln, a military veteran and member of the HPC, performs the day-to-day care.

Another local interviewed in the documentary was Paul Schulte of the Builders Club. He read

See 'Whispers', Page A2

## Coyotes curious county cohabitants

By JULIA DIGERONIMO  
For the Star and Wave

WEST CAPE MAY — Cape May Animal Control Officer Steven Sterwaka said last week that county residents share their neighborhoods with numerous coyotes.

Cape May County has a large coyote population, Sterwaka said, but ensured Borough Commission on Feb. 12 that the animals are not a threat to residents. Sterwaka explained that coyotes are attracted to human food and small animals such as rodents.

"They're not looking to attack you; they're curious," Sterwaka said. "They just live here and are just checking you out because you're their neighbors."

He warned residents that small dogs

are vulnerable to coyote attacks and not to leave pets outside unattended.

Coyotes stay in populated areas rather than the woods because it's easier for them to find food to survive. He said coyote populations are difficult to control and killing them won't slow their population growth. When coyotes feel threatened, he said, they birth larger litters to maintain their numbers.

Sterwaka said the coyotes are not going anywhere anytime soon and advised residents to stay informed about the animal.

In other business, Commissioner George Dick suggested requiring a public worker to be on duty during all events at Borough Hall. Anyone can rent the building for an event, and

Dick thinks someone from the borough should be present.

"If people want to rent the building, that's fine, and it's \$150 to cover the cost of the public worker. We're protecting our building and looking out for things. If there's a problem, we have a person to take care of it."

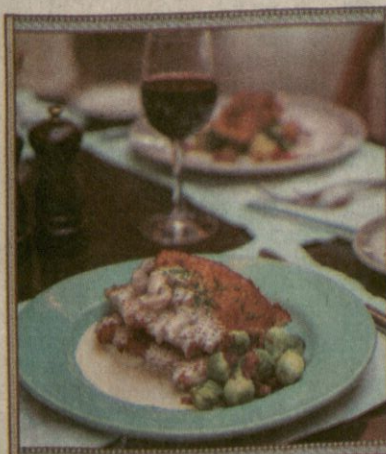
Commissioner Giacomo Antonicello suggested not renting Borough Hall but both Dick and Mayor Carol Sabo disagreed.

The board decided to study the issue further.

Borough Commission discussed drafts of five ordinances.

The first would require contractors to clean up any wood and plastic

See Coyotes, Page A2



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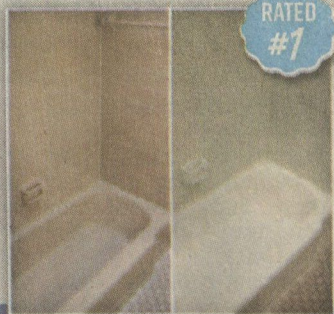
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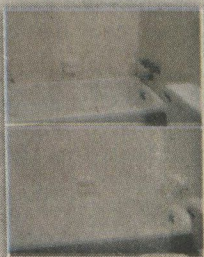
- The biggest expense is installing a new tub and surrounding or converting it to a walk in shower. This is typically around \$15,000.
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## Whispers

Continued from Page A1

an article about the cemetery's state of disrepair and wanted to get involved in its upkeep because of the veterans buried there.

A poignant story told during the documentary was the gravesite of nine Black sailors who were found on a Delaware Bay beach in Lower Township around 1850. Pary told the story, explaining no one knew where the soldiers came from or could find any identification. There were no survivors of the shipwreck.

A Boy Scout project completed a sitting area around this gravesite, while another Scout chose to restore the flagpole and create a walking bridge entrance as his Eagle Project.

The tale of the unidentified sailors is one of the untold stories in the cemetery, as are the few headstones that contain Confederate markings. It was speculated these soldiers started out fighting for the

Confederacy, possibly in place of their owners, but ultimately ended up fighting for the Union.

Despite its short runtime, the documentary is packed full of pertinent information, including evidence Turner was involved in the Underground Railroad and speculation he may have hidden enslaved people on his property. The church that Turner founded is also mentioned during the documentary, including a surprise viewers will learn about the building's survival and current existence.

As the documentary takes viewers on a trip through time, they learn the last names and some of the occupations of the many community members buried in the cemetery, including the Vances, the Turners and the Washingtons.

Playwright Stephen Larsen was interviewed regarding his play "Other Side of Jordan," about the Underground Railroad in Cape May.

The scope of the documentary imparts to the viewer the importance of telling history and the changing culture of those who came before.

After the documentary, Millaway and assistant director Tom Coyle, along with White, Eveyln, Wilson, Von Coln and Larsen,

## Coyotes

Continued from Page A1

contaminants before leaving their work sites to ensure no waste is blown onto the street or adjacent properties.

Sabo said it is another effort to prevent unnecessary waste. The Environmental Commission and Planning Board will review the ordinance. Cape May is considering a similar ordinance.

Two ordinances involve water line replacement and water conservation.

Public Works requested an ordinance to regulate demolition and replacment of water lines made of lead or other hazardous materials.

"Prior to demolition, the



Frank Scott/For the STAR AND WAVE Pary Tell, chairwoman of the Lower Township Historic Preservation Commission, discusses the importance of making the documentary detailing the history of the cemetery.

took time to answer questions.

"History is messy and when you're going through it there are certain facts you're not sure are right or wrong," Millaway said. "But what we've learned recently is that if history is messy, you know you are going down the right course. There are just some

things we don't know."

"Whispers from the Forgotten" tells more than the stories of cemeteries, acknowledging those who came before and their contributions that shaped the local area. The Union Bethel Civil War Veterans Cemetery is off Tabernacle Road in the Erma section of Lower Township.

property owner must arrange for a qualified inspector to identify the material of which the service lines are made and confirm with our Water Sewer Department and replace the water service lines," Sabo said.

Commissioners also discussed amending a 1994 ordinance on water conservation and emergencies to add that residents must have rain gauges on their meters to prevent sprinklers from turning on during rainstorms. The ordinance also discusses how the city would handle severe droughts.

The fourth ordinance would authorize updating the tax map.

"On a yearly basis, we

need to update the tax map so they are accurate and reflect all the changes that have gone on in the past year," Sabo said.

The final ordinance discussed was a proposal for the permitting process with the Department of Environmental Protection for the pedestrian and bicycle bridge improvements.

"This is to move it to the next step for the bridge," Dick said. "The next step is to talk to the DEP, set the surveys and we're working with Cape May to work out how the cost is going to work. They came up with the idea that we can probably get a grant from Cape May County open space."