

While You Were Away...

Before officially welcoming in the shore-filled summer of 2009, when the average shore goer will be having way too much fun for such things as off-season happenings, this column takes a peak at all the noteworthy events (and a few fun facts) that occurred While You Were Away. During that time of crisp salty air and snow-dappled beaches, ambitious shore lovers resisted a long winter's nap in favor of all things Wildwood. Sections of boardwalk history were torn down, while businesses, old and new, were built up.

As the stars align above a vast ocean, shining on the start of a brand new season, we remember the wise words of novelist Louis L'Amour, "There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. That will be the beginning."

And so, since true believers know nothing in Wildwood is every really finished, we head back to the beginning...

We've reported on thousands of demolitions over the past five years, many of them near and dear to our hearts. This year, the most noticeable demolitions were Russo's Restaurant, Shipwreck Island Miniature Golf Course and the Golden Nugget.

We'll Miss You All!

A History Lesson

Joseph Russo, along with wife Elizabeth and brother Sam, opened what was originally known as "The Gingham Club" in 1922 with the goal of treating customers like family. In 1955, the restaurant was renamed Russo's. For 86 years, the Russo's remained true to their long-standing family tradition. While traditions remain the same, times do change. So, along with the changing times, Russo's Restaurant & Bar, one of the island's oldest, family-owned businesses, closed their doors in October 2008, leaving a delicious history behind. Stories of family bootleggers and rum runners were told, as the Russo's planned the restaurant's final meals. Once the announcement came that the restaurant would be closing, customers came out in droves, wanting one last Russo's meal. A true family affair, each family member has worked their share of shifts at the restaurant, some while pursuing an education in other fields. Joseph and Elizabeth's six children grew up in the business, helping in any way necessary. Son Joe, along with Joe's wife Pat and their daughters Amy Coleman and Lisa Russo, as well as Joe's sisters Bianca Sanford and Rae Santaniello are among the many proud employees. Santaniello owned the restaurant while her brother Joe was the bar's proprietor. Daughter Amy was considered Joe's best employee, running the bar and devoting her life to the restaurant they all loved. Mixed emotions filled the establishment on their last days, as customers and family alike shared happy memories and sad good-byes.

As Times Change...

An exciting new beginning followed the sad good-byes at Russo's Restaurant when Chuck Burns, former owner of the Angelsea Pub, purchased the 86 year old establishment. With new owners and a complete transformation, the landmark restaurant became The Ice House. City commissions approved their request to somewhat extend the awnings over city property as the Ice House finds its place in Wildwood's history.

Timely Real Estate Revelations

A few short years back, real estate investors witnessed a 2-percent-a-month appreciation in values. The average observer knew it wouldn't last. These days, new construction has slow down by 30 percent with a drop in prices and sales, overall, are down. Real estate values are still climbing, with different market levels responding in their own way. Real estate investments are still expected to pay off, with the rental market blooming. A property rented during the summer months can usually bring in approximately half its mortgage. According to several Cape May County realtors, the tranquil coastline has even become a popular holiday getaway during the winter months. The number of renters during the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year holidays has significantly increased, with a nearly 50 percent discount compared to summertime rates as well as great holiday shopping in a well-decorated atmosphere. Foreclosures and deeds from sheriff sales, however, were on the rise, which could mean good deals for some buyers. With supply and demand being the name of the economic game, prices may continue to drop with fewer houses being built.

A Revealing Pacific Avenue and Beyond

Longtime resident, business owner, and passionate Pacific Avenue advocate Cathy Nesbitt Smith had spent nearly 15 years at five Pacific Avenue locations before finally settling into a permanent place at 4501 Pacific Avenue. Her year-round variety store, Junke & Treasures, comes complete with a wide selection of reasonably priced items including antiques, collectibles, and home décor sold with personal attention to a loyal following.

Wanting to contribute to the community, Smith offered her time in cleaning and beautifying Pacific Avenue and its surroundings and participated in Main Street Wildwood's Design Committee where she helped run the annual Project Pride downtown cleanup. She also employs a program in which customers, by appointment, can consign merchandise in return for a store discount. Half of all proceeds go to local charities.

A Tropical (Pacific Avenue) Touch

A new tropically-themed mural, designed by Philadelphia artist Delia King, is now colorfully displaced on the side of Key West Café. Owners Steve and Jackie Mikulski wanted to brighten Pacific Avenue while representing Key West Café's tranquil tone.

The year-round café serves up home-style cooking, homemade soups, fresh salads, and specialty burgers and sandwiches.

The Mikulski's, who opened Key West Café July 4th, planned big-screen TV entertainment for a BYOB Sunday football brunch.

Wildwood's Touch of Hollywood

The annual Wildwood-By-The-Sea Film Fest saw stars of all kinds. Actor Paul Sorvino was awarded the 'Film Icon Award' by Film Fest Director Paul Russo at the screening of his new film, "Greetings From the Shore."

Russo was optimistic that future film events would develop thanks to contributing filmmakers and the support of the Greater Wildwood Hotel Motel Association.

Surf Avenue Safety

Following a busy summer 2008, a plan to improve safety on the heavily-traveled Surf Avenue included a series of concrete islands, from 18th to 26th avenues complete with parking spaces. Once home to 64 spaces, the improvements resulted in nearly 80 additional parking spaces. Replacement of city sewer lines was first on the agenda, following a focus on the street surface and parking. More than \$1 million in bond money funded the project, along with \$350,000 in Urban Enterprise Zone funds requested to finance installing the concrete traffic islands. Instead of meters, parking spaces will be screened with centrally located kiosks.

Safe Water Ways...

Mayor Troiano held a special meeting in November to talk about the city's flooding issues. Problems related to the flooding issues include aged underground service lines and pump station costs in the millions. All possible grants were applied for, with Development Director Lew Ferrara working on a plan providing financial aid to homeowners interested in elevating their homes.

A Community Way of Celebrating

The grand opening of the Byrne Community Center, hosted by the Wildwood Recreation Commission along with the City of Wildwood, was held October 26th. The highly-anticipated, state-of-the-art facility is Wildwood's first new community center in 45 years and includes an 8,000 square foot gymnasium, dance studio, computer lab, conference room and offices, exercise room, and professional kitchen.

The ground-breaking facility, located at the Maxwell Field Athletic Complex on Park Blvd, houses its own power generator and has been designated as a Red Cross Evacuation Center and a secondary evacuation site for Wildwood High School.

The Byrne Fund, set up by local insurance legend Jack Byrne as a way of giving back to the community, donated \$1 million toward the center's cost.

Visit www.byrnecommunitycenter.com for further information.

Constructing the Way to an Everlasting Tribute

Following the bittersweet success in July 2008 of “The Wall That Heals,” a half-scale replica of the original Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. that made its way through the city, Greg Mazzotta, who passed away in September, became inspired by the possibility of having an enduring Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Wildwood. Now his cousin, Vince DePrinzio, treasurer of the Vietnam Veterans of America Wildwood Chapter 955, is working alongside his chapter and American Legion and VFW posts to make Greg’s dream a reality while paying tribute to the 58,000 who lost their lives or who were reported missing during the Vietnam War. Major fundraising would be required by the local VVA, American Legion and VFW posts as well as finalizing a location for the wall. DePrinzio acknowledged Mayor Ernie Troiano Jr. and Commissioner Bill Davenport as working toward finding a permanent place for the wall.

Everlasting Irish Luck Abounds

Beautiful weather combined with huge, happy crowds made 2008’s Irish Weekend a great success. The hour-long parade boasted non-stop pipers and Irish dancers, who paid tribute to Wildwood’s proud Irish heritage. A variety of vendors were on hand to satisfy all Irish-related needs. The 2009 Irish Weekend will be held September 24th to September 27th.

An Irish Farewell

Many words were used to describe Patrick Ward following his death Oct. 31st. Husband, father, Korean War veteran, pilot, master craftsman, long-time Wildwood Crest resident, 30-year popular proprietor and bar tender at Wildwood’s Shamrock Café, and life-long friend. Long-time friend Bill Callahan spoke of meeting Ward in St. Ann’s first grade class. They would become constant childhood companions. Back when aviation regulations weren’t so tight, Ward was seen landing and taking off in his shamrock-covered 1943 Stearman Navy trainer bi-plane on Wildwood beaches, reportedly dropping ping-pong balls near the Shamrock Café labeled “free drinks”.

Ward leaves the people of Wildwood with decades of fond memories and unique stories to be passed on for generations to come. Mayor Troiano described Ward as a legend in town and the “quintessential Irishman.”

The Legendary Fabulous 50s

The Greater Wildwoods Chamber of Commerce Fabulous 50’s Weekend made a fabulous, three-day return into Wildwood Oct. 17th. A classic car show, sponsored by the Hotel Motel Association, took place in front of the Wildwoods Convention Center and featured approximately 80 cars along the streets as visitors enjoyed the “Back to the 50s tour.” Fox Park hosted the free Fabulous ‘50s Street Fair. Live music, along with food and craft vendors, as well as hula-hoop and bubble-gum blowing contests were a part of the event leading up to the Saturday night Fabulous ‘50s Concert in the Oceanfront Arena. The concert lasted four and a half hours, opening with a classic 1970 Elvis performance by the Mahoney Brothers. Doo-Wop era groups Terry Johnson’s Flamingoes and The Del Vikings received standing ovations. Ben E. King and Gary U.S. Bonds were also showcased.

Former Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Andy Cripps started the Fabulous 50’s Weekend, emphasizing Philadelphia’s bond with Wildwood and the 1950s. The event consistently contributes to Wildwood’s economy while extending the season. Present Executive Director Tracey Dufault, along with her Greater Wildwood Chamber of Commerce team, have done a tremendous job organizing and promoting the last three years of events with no sign of stopping.

Get your tickets to 2009’s Fabulous 50’s Weekend early. With the Golden Boys ~ Bobby Rydell, Frankie Avalon, and Fabian on the marquee, the event is guaranteed to sell out fast!

The Fabulous Interactive Doo Wop Days

According to the Cape May County Culture and Heritage Commission, the city’s Doo Wop Museum, located at Ocean and Burk avenues, will be the recipient of one of the “history re-grants.” The \$1,300 grant will aid in funding the Lynch I-Wall, which features a computer-generated touch screen. Grant application was submitted by the Doo Wop Preservation League, who promised a surplus of Wildwood-related graphics (including the beaches, boardwalk, and the history of rock and roll), animation, audio, and video of mid-century architecture, which could be easily maneuvered by sliding the LCD monitor. The I-Wall was scheduled to debut in 2009.

Preserving Wildwood’s Historic Days

Trolley car number 20 found its fame, as well as its home, in 1912, becoming the only electric trolley car made solely for the city of North Wildwood. Adding to its fame, Mario Lanza, who would become a well-known movie star and singer, worked as a trolley conductor as a young man. In its time, the approximately 35 feet trolley traveled many miles. Now it resides in a building on Wildwoods New Jersey and Spencer Avenues. Funding for the trolley's restoration is required for it to be displayed as a Wildwood museum piece.

Preservation supporters include Allied Signs Company, the Morey Organization, National Associates, the borough of Wildwood Crest and city of North Wildwood and Polar Communication, Shawcrest Construction, Sawyer Electric, Full House Marketing, and CMC freeholders. Cost for mobilizing the trolley, while preserving a significant part of Wildwood history, would exceed 100,000.

Contributing to History

Because Wildwood's history requires significant space, the Wildwood Historical Society began the process of adding on to George F. Boyer Museum over a year ago. By the end of 2008, Wildwood Fire Co. No. 1 donated \$500 to the Wildwood Historical Society for the expansion of the museum, which is home to countless Wildwood vintage photos and memorabilia.. An entire room has been devoted to police and fire memorabilia. Will Morey of the Morey Organization donated \$1,000. By year's end \$30,000 had been donated to the building's fund. The names of those contributing \$500 or more were placed on a plaque in the new addition. The proposed addition provides nearly 1000 square feet of added space at a cost of roughly \$125,000. The building comes complete with a security system, special fire suppression system, and an independent heating and cooling system. An anticipated April 2009 dedication date was scheduled.

Contributing to Education

Thanks to a \$10,000 contribution made by the Doug Raucci Forget-Me-Not Foundation, a pre-vocational center was established in the Cape May County Special Services School District. The center was named for Down Syndrome student Doug Raucci, a well-loved attendee of the special services district who passed away over two years ago. Sisters Amanda and Melissa Raucci held the first successful one-mile Buddy Walk for the foundation and the National Down Syndrome Society in April 2008, with donations going toward the Down Syndrome Society as well as students attending the Special Services School District.

The Boardwalk Report

Although things continue to change in our seaside town, they have a way, at heart, of remaining the same. Manager of the Boardwalk Special Improvement District (SID) Patrick Rosenello looked to the real estate boom of years past that brought with it a revival in boardwalk expansion. New businesses blended with old favorites at a rapid pace. The fast-food-filled, t-shirt-driven boardwalk of childhoods gone by has welcomed as its neighbors more upscale businesses. Family-friendly businesses were on the rise as new ventures looked to the past to shape the boardwalk's future. Stewart's Root Beer, The Cook's Shoppe, the expanding Sand Jamm Surf Shop, Pete's Pork Roll, Boyd's Barbeque, among others, have in recent years joined the boarded ranks along with the renovation of Morey's water park into the tropical Ocean Oasis. While Rosenello looked at these changes as positive, he emphasized that the boardwalk has maintained its same unique, endearing ways.

Boardwalk Merchant News

Boardwalk's Best just got Bigger & Better! Owner Michelle Rutkowski has done her "boardwalk best" at expanding the store's Glenwood Ave. location by a storefront, offering even more of the best souvenirs, beach needs, unique seashell gifts, quality fashions and much more. The 25th Avenue store also provides boardwalk walkers with the same superior merchandise. Stewart's Root Beer begins their second year of serving all-American cuisine with an amazing, all-American view from the top deck, while they proudly introduce Stewart's Water Ice at the old Hunt's Pier.

Sand Jamm Surf Shop @ Juniper Ave on the World Famous Wildwood Boardwalk is celebrating their 18th year in business. They start the day very simply, by thinking about how they can do their job better in order to make your visit special. They are honored and always thankful to be a part of this community. But most importantly, Steve Mendel would like to thank his wife Jacqueline for her unconditional support for

the last 12yrs & for letting him be who he is & do what he does. He asked us to send this message to his wife, "I love you!" and to his girls, "Hello Elizabeth & Emily, you are my sweet girls."
Stop in to see all of the new things they are doing for 2009.
No...Shirt...No Shoes...No Problem!A Trendier Boardwalk

The Wildwood Boardwalk Special Improvement District (WSID) issued its yearly report in February, stating the boardwalk's positive growth in 2008. The boardwalk's improved community image is a direct result of the WSID-supported nightly entertainment, craft shows and fireworks line up, as well as renovated and new stores and restaurants alongside waterpark additions, an appearance on the Food Network, and two filmed music videos.

WSID Executive Director Patrick Rosenello believes by returning to the days of distinctive, smaller owned and operated shops, the boardwalk has become trendy once again, becoming one of the few remaining successful seaside amusement boardwalks in the country.

The Boardwalk of Times Gone by

Part of boardwalk history was made on October 20th when representatives from Walters Marine Corporation began demolishing the Schellenger section of the boardwalk.

Phase I, a project fully funded through grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the NJ Urban Enterprises, will cost over \$4 million and cover approximately three boardwalk blocks and include a tunnel at Schellenger Avenue to assist emergency vehicles onto the beach. A challenging completion date of Easter 2009 was set.

Boardwalk Renewal

Following an ongoing debate about the type of wood to use in phase one of the boardwalk reconstruction, during which time domestic black locust wood (which arrived in poor condition in summer 2008) was rejected, Mayor Ernie Troiano publicly announced the city would have to use woods like ipe (pronounced "ee pay"). With a short, projected Easter completion date, the city would need to use such tropical woods most commonly harvested in the Amazon's rainforest.

The mayor's announcement produced national news coverage, along with the concern of environmentalists as well as the Wildwood's Boardwalk Special Improvement Districts (WSID), representative of about 300 Wildwood businesses.

A Boardwalk Alternative

The Cedar Avenue Boardwalk Outdoor Craft Show, an outdoor market located beside the Cedar Avenue Boardwalk every weekend from Memorial Day to Labor Day, will feature fresh fruits and vegetables, flowers, and handcrafted items. John Nickels, of Nickels Midway Pier, helped develop the concept along with a group from the Wildwood Tourism Development Commission as one way to raise commission money for events while offering something different to the community. The outdoor market will have a projected 28 booths focusing on things not typically found on the boardwalk.

Another Historic Boardwalk Moment

In January, a fitting tribute was nostalgically paid to the classic boardwalk ride the Golden Nugget prior to its removal from Hunt's Pier. The Golden Nugget, which made its debut in July 1960, symbolized the boardwalk's golden age. The ceremony was bittersweet for Jack and Will Morey of The Morey Organization, who strive to preserve The Golden Nugget's memory while looking forward to something worthy and innovating taking its place. Before the three-story mine ride was removed, the Morey Organization announced plans to salvage parts, including tracks and trains, of the Golden Nugget. Looking toward the future while commemorating the past, the Moreys announced plans for the new, one-of-its-kind, colossal coaster which would expand between two piers.

In other Morey's News...

On Nov. 17th, Morey's Piers and Beachfront Waterparks were cited for outstanding achievement by the International Association for Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) in Orlando along with the 2008 "Spirit of Excellence" award for its advanced training and professional development program. Morey's Pier also won the prestigious "2008 Must-See Waterpark" award, contending with waterparks across the globe.

Wildwood's Must-See Play-offs

The 10th Annual Boardwalk Classic Tournament, the largest co-ed high school basketball tournament in the country, made a return engagement to the Wildwoods December 26th through December 31st. Nearly 80 games were played during the event, comprised of brackets named in remembrance of local area residents. Wildwood Catholic High School and Wildwood High School were among those students competing. Proceeds went toward college scholarships for 2009 graduating students from those schools.

Off-Boardwalk News

Keenan's gets an Overhaul

Keenan's renovated their 1st Avenue corner section called Angry Jacks and its patio. Just in time for summer!

A Big End to a Miniature Era

Another city landmark and family fun spot has seen its final days. Shipwreck Island, a jungle-themed 36-hole miniature golf course located at the Park Place Entertainment Center in Wildwood, was torn day to pave the way for a Walgreen's pharmacy store. Out of 4500 stores, it will be the only doo-wop themed and designed store in the country.

Bigger, Better Barbeque Blues

North Wildwood city council granted approval to expand the annual New Jersey State Barbeque Championship competition. The contest, held in union with the Anglesea Blues Festival, will move its competitors' area to the city-owned Spruce Avenue parking lot. The larger site will raise competition from 28 to 64 teams.

Now in its 11th year in North Wildwood, the barbeque-inspired event will be held July 10-12 and feature live blues music, classic cars and fire trucks and cooking demonstrations.

Bigger Improvements Continue

In December, residents, business owners, and city officials met to discuss North Wildwood's move toward forming a Business Improvement District (BID), a self-governing body granting services to a particular district of properties through a self-imposed public assessment, as well as a public-private partnership handled by a private, non-profit organization. BID required city council approval with the goal of the Anglesea section of North Wildwood, along with the entertainment district and residents, working together as one organization to achieve a universal objective. The Anglesea section was chosen due to their diversity of non-boardwalk establishments and festivals taking place from around Fourth Avenue to Olde New Jersey Avenue.

Should the BID come to pass, the UEZ funding, with an \$18,000 request, would be considered a loan that Anglesea is required to pay back.

Plans, however, met with mixed reactions among concerned business owners in the fall of 2008 as economic worries threatened to curtail moving forward. While business owners weighed cost factors, the majority agreed that BID may have to wait for economically stronger days.

The Wait for Small Screen Conversion

Despite the variety of entertainment available in Wildwood, television viewing continues to be a popular pastime. On June 12th, 2009, television stations in the United States will stop broadcasting in analog and make the conversion to digital cable. The switch will result in a clearer picture, more channels, and more airwave space to be used by emergency responders. The Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act was passed by Congress in 2005. Televisions that received signals through old-time "rabbit ears" or rooftop antennas will require a digital converter box.

Converting to a Well-lit Wildwood Crest

Taking a step further in the restoration of Wildwood Crest's beach pier, a lighting system, extending from the pier's entrance off the Wildwood Crest Bike Path at Heather Road to the pier's end at the foot of the Atlantic Ocean, was installed. For safety purposes, as well as an enhanced view, the lights will shine from dusk to dawn.

The former Wildwood Crest Fishing Pier, which was built in 1919 and owned and operated by the Wildwood Crest Fishing Club for over 85 years, was ultimately turned over to the borough in 2006. The pier, which celebrated its grand reopening ceremony in July 2008, was restored through the assistance of a \$400,000 grant from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, which allocated the funds to make the pier handicap accessible. Now that the pier is in full agreement with Americans with Disabilities regulations, those with disabilities can now enjoy beach time on firm ground complete with hand rails from beginning to end. In addition to its breathtaking, elevated beach and ocean view, the Beach Pier is also home to several summer morning fitness programs with many events and activities planned for the summer of 2009.

Wildwood Crest Gets a Street Restoration...

2009 began with street repairs and restoration at the top of each city's calendar. Wildwood Crest was no exception. The availability of the New Jersey Environmental Infrastructure Trust project funding was discussed during a January commission meeting. Included in the discussion was the designation of the third phase of the Seaview Avenue restoration project and the outfall reconstruction at Washington Avenue. The funding is a no-to-low interest loan established by Congress and endowed by the Department of Environmental Protection and the NJEIT.

Seaview Avenue work included replacing existing sanitary sewer mains, laterals, curbs, gutters, driveways, sidewalks, a complete storm sewer system replacement, and total roadway reconstruction and striping improvements.

Due to roadway corrosion, Wildwood Crest Beach Avenue was filled and resurfaced with the replacement of the storm water sewer on Hollywood Avenue between Seaview Avenue and the beach.

More Restorations Leads to More Beach to Love

In January, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Bureau of Coastal Engineering announced the approval of the city's Beachfront restoration. Approximately 1.2 million cubic yards of sand will be placed back onto the beaches from second to 26th avenues.

Also, in an effort to protect the city from harsh storms and flooding, a dune system will be set in position. The restoration project, with an anticipated \$10 million cost (75% state funded, 25% city funded), was expected to take three months to complete.

Another Beach Extension

The Wildwood Crest Department of Public Works constructed beach dunes on the north side of the Beach Pier at Heather Road thanks in part to recycled Christmas trees. The dunes protect properties, street ends, and the beach from wearing away and flooding. The dunes now extend from the Rambler Road Beach north side to the Cresse Avenue beach. The Beach Dune project was started in winter 2007. During that time, the Department of Public Works, in union with the Wildwood Crest Environmental Commission, built dunes from Rambler Road Beach north to the Wisteria Road Beach. In winter 2008, the dunes were extended from the Wisteria Road Beach to the beach pier's south side.

A Reading Expansion

The Cape May County Library Commission proposed a plan to renovate the Crest branch of the library, located at 6301 Ocean Avenue. Commissioner Don Cabrera stated the library is owned by the borough, but was leased to the Library Commission approximately four years ago. Following an analysis and feasibility study, the commission investigated what architecturally needed renovating. The Library Commission would use its own funds, bonded through the county.

They plan on adding about 2,500 square feet, with big rooms for programs and reading along with renovating the children's area while making the library more ADA (Americans and Disabilities Act) compliant.

Reaching out through Air Waves

City officials, locals, and visitors praised North Wildwood's first-ever low-power AM Radio Station (1640 AM) launched in 2008.

The radio station's objective is to broadcast information in the event of a public emergency or storm, breaking into regular programming to provide up-to-the-minute information. Emergency personnel can access the radio station from an isolated site as well as relay information "live" on the radio airwaves from

a secluded spot. Outside of emergencies, the radio station, which can be heard several miles outside of the community, relays a variety of community events taking place in the city while providing complete reporting to the city.

Mayor Henfey praised the technology while stating that because of the support of many local organizations and businesses, including Anglesea Volunteer Fire Company, Van Note Harvey Engineering Firm, Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), Remington Vernick Engineering Firm, North Wildwood Tavern Owners Association, North Wildwood Volunteer Fire Company, Triad Associates, and Wawa, no cost were incurred by city taxpayers.

The 1640AM radio station resides inside the North Wildwood Public Safety Building, at 5th and New Jersey Avenues in North Wildwood.

Visit www.northwildwood.com for further information.

Reaching Toward More Spiritual Moments

While the holidays were being celebrated, plans were underway to merge Assumption and Saint Ann's Catholic Churches. The Core Team, comprised of eight Catholics committed to working together to outline a new parish, was soon put in place to plan the merger. The team worked on a Facilities Use Plan, as well as naming the new parish while developing a foundation for the parish ministries and staffing.

A Charitable Moment

Starting off the holidays on a charitable note, St. Ann Regional School in Wildwood held its very first Gobble Wobble, a 5K run and one-mile walk fund-raiser. The race began and ended at St. Ann's Regional School on New Jersey and Magnolia Avenues where runners soon hit the streets of Wildwood and North Wildwood's Boardwalk. Approximately 120 runners took part in the occasion. Wildwood Crest's Steve DelMonte won the 5K run in 18 minutes, 47 seconds while Wildwood's Kaitlyn Marzullo became the first female to finish with a time of 25:44 and placing 10th overall.

Seeking Safer Holiday Moments

The North Wildwood Police Department became the only law enforcement agency in Cape May County to land a \$5,000 drunk driving law enforcement grant. As one of approximately 100 law enforcement agencies in the state to receive the grant, police agencies throughout the state will partake in the nationwide program aimed at fighting holiday drunk driving. The holidays are considered one of the most hazardous traveling times of the year.

Looking for Safe, Dry Land

City officials are working toward reducing flooding for local residents. Mayor Troiano stressed that much work needs to be done with expenses being inevitable. During an informal city hall meeting in November, the mayor cited that many of the city's flooding problems were caused by a neglect of the water, sewer and storm system. The large beaches are also part of the problem. While the city consistently supplies money and manpower to digging out the storm drain outfall pipers, this method has only proven helpful to some extent. City Engineer Mark De Blasio, of Remington Vernick & Walberg, stated the engineering firm was working toward solving the flooding problem, with a citywide Storm Sewer Master Plan Project being designed to direct future capital improvement projects.

The High Rise Flies

The state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) granted a Coastal Area Facilities Review Act (CAFRA) permit for Martinique Resorts, the 23 story, 230- unit high-rise to be located between Wildwood and Oak avenues, site of the former Martinique Hotel. Included will be three retail areas, two floors dedicated to dining and recreation, which includes a two-story 120-seat restaurant with an ocean view, indoor spa, exercise room, indoor/outdoor pool and conference rooms. This is the second of a series of high-rise hotels intended for the city's Tourist and Entertainment Zone and the final stride in a difficult three-year process of acquiring various government support.

The high-rise development has continually been a source of conflict for some residents concerned that this project, as well as other approved projects, is too big a plan for the surrounding area. Other concerns addressed were increased traffic, blocked views, and shadow coverage from the building.

City approval was given to six additional high-rise condolets including, the Nouveau Wave, the Wildwood Beach Resort and Hotel, the Starlight Resort, the East Bennett Project, the Waypoint Beach Club, and the Riviera. State approval has only been given to the Starlight and Martinique resorts.

Plunging for a Cause

A crowd of close to 500, with hundreds of cold, curious onlookers in attendance, courageously plunged into the frosty waters on January 17th to support the third annual Wildwoods Polar Bear Plunge for Special Olympics New Jersey. Each plunger pledged a minimum of \$100 to partake in the popular event. Special Olympics New Jersey is a non-profit organization that provides year round sports training and Olympic-like competition for those with special academic or developmental disabilities at no cost.

Biking for a Cause

No cause is more worthy to the people of Wildwood than one that facilitates beach time for a special child. Devoted beach lover Grace Rodgers, who is afflicted with spina bifida, had outgrown her unique beach wheelchair. A Bike Riders and Beef and Beer Fundraising was held on January 24th at the Bolero in Wildwood with proceeds going toward purchasing Grace's new Beach Wheel Chair.

Taking a (Leprechaun) Leap

On a late winter day, members of the Cape May County Police and Fire Emerald Society, among many others, took the plunge as part of Keenan's Irish Pub's inaugural Leprechaun Leap. With ocean temperatures topping off at 39.4 degrees, the cold, yet boisterous, crowd headed toward fifth avenue beach to support the Philadelphia Fallen Hero's Survival Fund, which provides for the families of police officers killed while on duty as well as supporting scholarship funds in remembrance of Ricky Lannetti and Britteny Shilling. A frosty time was had by all!

Cause for Firefighters' Funding

The city of North Wildwood Fire Department received \$100,768 in federal funding from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program. Since the program's 2001 inception, nearly \$18.6 million has been locally awarded to 110 organizations in the 2nd District.

Savings at the Shore

Despite the dark economic cloud stubbornly hanging overhead, the forecast for the summer of 2009 appears to be bright.

In late winter, real estate agents reported that summer rentals rose as much as 10 percent over 2008. An increase in summer rentals is a strong indicator of a successful summer season. Business owners are also cautiously optimistic, with Wildwood's easy access and lower gas rates appealing to everyone looking to save money.

The Greater Wildwoods Tourism Improvement and Development Authority began a summer ad campaign asking tourists "Are you free this summer? The Wildwoods are!" making reference to Wildwoods' free beach access.

Conclusion

Poet Robert Frost was once quoted as saying, "I have never started a poem whose end I knew. Writing a poem is discovery." As seasons end and a new Wildwood season begins, shore lovers continually discover the many things there are to love about this small seaside town with the big heart. Locals and visitors alike are treated to the best free beaches and boardwalk along with a variety of complimentary special events and crowd-pleasing festivals (and the most vibrant views). Wildwood truly does offer something for everyone with the promise of never-ending discoveries to come!