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Jen Arthur

Winter Tee Time

Mike Iannuzzi of Ocean City and Philadelphia picks out his club while his friend Stephen Fenning of Wynnewood, Pa. gets ready to take a swing at the Ocean City Golf Course Saturday next to the Ocean City Municipal Airport. The guys came down to Ocean City for a weekend with friends and to enjoy the unseasonably warm weather.

Administration says it's willing to listen on fire department plan Talks seek cost cut consensus

By CLAIRE LOWE Staff Writer

OCEAN CITY – Although the city's current fire department structure is working very well, are there ways to make it

more sustainable, business administrator Mike Dattilo asked Thursday, Jan. 5 at a workshop meeting of City Council.

Ocean City Council held the meeting at the library to discuss Councilmen Keith Hartzell and Scott Ping's proposed changes to the structure of the Fire Department, particularly how Emergency Management Technician services could be provided in the future.

Dattilo said that the subject has been reviewed several times over the last few decades and a lot of good input has been put forth.

"We have a great model in place, we have great services," he said, adding, "We are absolutely open to considering anything that won't jeopardize public safety and will allow us to operate more efficiently."

However, Dattilo pointed out that there are no confirmed retirements of firefighters for this year, making the proposal to restructure the department less urgent.

"As we sit here we don't have anybody confirmed to go in 2012," he said, "which leads me to say we're not at a dramatic decision point here tonight."

Hartzell, who, at a December council meeting, presented a plan for restructuring the fire department by replacing six firefighter/EMTs and three EMTs with lower-paid EMT-only personnel through attrition, began the discussion with questions

'We are absolutely open to considering anything that won't jeopardize public safety and will allow us to operate more efficiently.'

— Ocean City administrator Mike Dattilo

for the administration.

"There's no race here to get there, these are still at the idea stages," Hartzell said. "We certainly look forward to reaction both from the administration and the people in the audience."

According to Hartzell's presentation, there are 28 firefighters that work on the ambulance, making an average salary of \$97,400, which city Finance Director Frank Donato confirmed. Using a combination of full-time and part-time EMTs – one full-time and one part-time EMT will replace one firefighter – will mean a savings of \$322,350, Hartzell said.

He asked what problems would occur if the city were to replace the three current EMTs with lower paid EMTs, at a rate of \$15 per hour, the national average.

Donato said the administration agrees with the math and said that it is essentially how the city operates currently. He did point out that the \$15 per hour wage would still have to be negotiated and agreed to.

Hartzell's second question was if the city could or should replace both personnel that ride on ambulance one out of station one with EMT-only personnel. He said the savings, including fringe benefits, would be about \$217,590.

Acting Fire Chief Charlie Bowman responded, "Could we? Yes. Should we do that? My answer's no."

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Human Society expanding services

Low-cost clinic and animal control services now available

By ANN RICHARDSON Staff Writer

OCEAN CITY – Folks have been busy at the Ocean City Humane Society, but for 3-year old Parker and the rest of the animals housed at the facility, it's all about food and shelter.

The brown pomeranian - a loveable, friendly pooch who easily warms up to a visitor - is one of nine dogs and nearly 100 cats who call the no-kill shelter home. The humans caring for them have helped take the award-winning facility to the next level by offering boundless

love and compassion and top-notch care to their furry, four-pawed charges.

The facility is expanding at an unprecedented rate. On Jan. 1, the HSOC formally assumed animal control duties for the city of Ocean City

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Healthcare providers work to avoid unnecessary hospital visits

It's a familiar situation. An elderly heart failure patient is hospitalized with swollen legs and breathing difficulties, responds well to treatment, and is discharged with a set of written instructions.

Back home – alone – she forgets the dietary guidelines, delays making a follow-up appointment with her doctor, and does not take her medication regularly. Soon her symptoms are back and she returns to the hospital.

One in five older adults in New Jersey is readmitted to the hospital within a month of discharge, according to Healthcare Quality Strategies, Inc. (HQSI), a non-profit, federally-designated quality improvement organization for New Jersey. Healthcare organizations in Atlantic and Cape May counties are now working to avoid unnecessary hospital readmissions through

the Atlantic-Cape Community Coalition. The short-term goal is to reduce readmissions by 20 percent within the next three years.

At its kickoff meeting last month, at Atlantic Cape Community College in Mays Landing, more than 22 organizations participated, representing regional medical centers, nursing homes, home health agencies, rehabilitation facilities, the local Office on Aging and the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services.

AtlantiCare Healthcare at Home of Egg Harbor Township has begun interventions in which a nurse-coach helps patients understand and follow through with healthcare instructions. Caitlin Lehrfeld, an advanced practice nurse, acts as a liaison among patients, caregivers, and doctors to organize appointments, transportation, medication and more.

Instrumental to the process is use of a Personal Health Record, a booklet that patients can use to collect all of their vital health information in a single place.

"It's supposed to be with them for doctor's appointments, hospitalizations – really at all times," said Lehrfeld. "My number is on the front if they have any questions, and I point them in the right direction."

Lehrfeld is a constant resource for support, but the goal is to empower patients to take charge of their own health.

"If I do it for them," she said, "they won't learn."

Shore Medical Center of Somers Point is focusing on enhanced care and education for heart failure patients as a way to reduce avoidable readmissions. "We realized it's not just what happens in the hospital," said Barbara Juzaitis,



The Atlantic-Cape Community Coalition of healthcare providers is working to reduce unnecessary hospital readmissions by 20 percent by 2015. Participants include AtlantiCare, Shore Medical Center, Cape Regional Medical Center, Bayada Nurses and Holy Redeemer Home Care.

administrative director of care management. "We have to go well beyond that point – we need to advocate across the continuum of care."

"We are thrilled with the enthusiasm and participation we saw at the kickoff in Atlantic and Cape May counties," said Janet Knoth,

RN, of HQSI. "Area residents navigating the health system will see the ultimate benefits. And that, above all else, is our goal."



Submitted

Andrew Magee and Juan Vazquez of Stone Harbor Pizza are collecting used cellphones for Contact Cape Atlantic, which makes daily phone calls to the elderly and homebound.

Donors answer the call for cellphones

A holiday fundraiser for an organization that makes daily calls to homebound residents resulted in the donation of more than 100 used cellphones. The phones will be sold to a company that recycles them, and the proceeds will go to Contact Cape Atlantic, which serves more than 230 clients in Cape May and Atlantic counties.

Due to the generous response, the phone drive will continue indefinitely, said executive director Ann Magee.

"We're really optimistic it's going to generate some new income for us," Magee said of the drive. "With the economy, we're always looking for ways to interest people in donating."

Contact Cape Atlantic, a United Way agency with offices in Cape May Court House and Margate, provides free "telephone reassurance" to the elderly and disabled. A daily call checks that the client is well and safe and has taken his or her medication. It also offers a

friendly voice on the other end of the line.

The organization's Gatekeeper Program trains people such as postal carriers, cable company employees, bank tellers and others to recognize when an elderly person is in need of help.

The need is growing, Magee said. Contact Cape Atlantic made a total of 83,431 calls in 2011 – 9,300 more calls than in 2010.

"The more calls, the more costs are involved," she said.

Cell phone drop boxes are located at Contact Cape Atlantic, 9500 Ventnor Ave., Building 2, Margate; at C. Melini Salon, 518 Sea Isle Blvd. in Ocean View; and Stone Harbor Pizza, 315 96th St. in Stone Harbor. To organize a phone collection drive, call Magee at 823-1850.

For more information about Contact Cape Atlantic, see www.contactcapeatlantic.org.

— Marjorie Preston

Flu shots: who should get them, and why?

Clinician: Shots important for almost everyone

Influenza season runs from September through the early spring, but the drive for flu shots and the incidence of flu cases typically intensify during the winter.

Mike Heck, infection control practitioner for AtlantiCare, said influenza can be more prevalent now for several reasons.

"During the winter, more people are indoors" in forced hot-air heat, which dries the mucus membranes and makes the nose a prime "portal of entry" for the

virus to adhere, Heck said. Cold air, which is also drier, does the same thing, making it easier for viruses to proliferate.

Flu vaccinations work by introducing a trace of the virus into the system, so the recipient can build antibodies against the full strain. Heck said the Centers for Disease Control recommends flu shots for "everyone from six months and up," and emphasizes the importance of inoculation for several populations: the

very young; the elderly; and the immune-suppressed. American Indians are also at greater risk for flu.

At this time of year, pharmacies, doctor's offices and clinics all push flu shots. All are safe, Heck said. "There are only three vaccinations that have been FDA-approved that are injectable, so no matter where you get it – the doctor's office, the clinic, the pharmacy – it's safe."

While the vaccination can result in mild flu symptoms or irritation or swelling

at the injection site, it's a small price to pay to prevent flu, which is highly contagious and can be spread from one person to another – through coughs, sneezes, and surface contact – before the carrier knows he or she is really ill.

"The risks of getting the flu and being out of work and transmitting to others is much greater than getting the flu shot," Heck said. "It protects you and the ones you care about."

— Marjorie Preston

Weight loss: take it slow and steady

January is resolution time, and the No. 1 New Year's pledge is to lose a few (or more than a few) pounds.

Some dieters set themselves up for disappointment with unrealistic quick-weight loss plans. Susan Lord, registered dietitian and diabetes educator for AtlantiCare, said even small amounts of total body weight can have a positive effect on overall health – and the best way to lose weight permanently is to lose it slowly.

"Research has shown that 5 to 10 percent of

weight lost can decrease the risk factors for disease related to obesity," Lord said. "Even a modest weight loss can mean big benefits."

In fact, the first 5 percent to 7 percent of weight loss can make a big difference in overall health, Reed said, decreasing blood sugar, blood pressure, and LDL, the bad cholesterol that can clog arteries. That initial drop also lowers unhealthy levels of triglycerides (blood fats) in the system.

"Of course a good weight loss program will include physical activity, and that raises the good cholesterol,

the HDL, which we want," Lord said.

Other benefits of an improved eating plan and activity are increased energy and physical mobility.

"In general, your mood improves and also your self-confidence," Lord added.

When it comes to diet plans, one size doesn't fit all, and moderate but consistent changes add up.

"I actually recommend small lifestyle changes, like using cooking spray in the pan instead of oil or butter," Lord said. "By just taking out 100 calories a day, like two Oreo cookies, you can

lose 10 pounds over a year. Cut out 200 calories a day, which would be like taking out eight ounces of juice and two Oreos, and you can lose 20 pounds in a year."

Two more points to remember: Sufficient sleep is vital to weight loss. Sleep deprivation decreases leptin, a hormone that signals fullness, and increases ghrelin, a hormone that triggers hunger.

So take it slow and steady, get enough rest, and look forward to a slimmer you this year.

— Marjorie Preston



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