

Mayor's Message

Oct/Nov 2024

Days are getting shorter, kids are back in school, Monmouth Park's season has ended, and Summer's End 2024 in Oceanport is now just another wonderful memory. Wonderful things happened this summer in Oceanport! It's simply amazing how quickly the time goes by, especially in summertime at the beautiful Jersey Shore. Now the leaves are starting to change, and fall is upon us which also brings about a special time at the shore.

Summer's End Festival was, once again, an amazing small-town event that ended with an even more amazing and big town fireworks display. Ask anybody who watched this year's fireworks, and they will tell you they were the best ever! Let's not forget that the Summer's End Festival was a success because of all the hard work, incredible organization, and meticulous planning on the part of Recreation Coordinator Kelle Burrough, Councilman President Bill Deerin, and the selfless volunteers on the Oceanport Parks & Recreation Committee. All of whom coordinated their efforts with our Department of Public Works, Fire Department, Police Department, and First Aid Squad to ensure everybody was as safe as they were satisfied. Notwithstanding the fact the celebration had to be pushed back a day because of the weather, Oceanport came together and closed out the summer of 2024 in style. It's quite a privilege to walk through Blackberry Bay Park at Summer's End watching children and adults very much enjoying themselves. Community events like this are what makes Oceanport such a "Great Place to Live." Keeping traditional celebrations like Summer's End, the Memorial Day Parade, the Easter Egg Hunt, and the Christmas Tree Lighting is what small-town living is all about.

December is just around the corner and this year's Annual Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony is going to be better than ever. With Summer's End in their rear-view mirror, the Parks & Recreation Committee has decided that the 2024 Christmas Tree Lighting will take place on November 30th in front of Russel Hall on Fort Monmouth. It will be the culmination of a four-hour Christmas Extravaganza that will start at 2:00 pm. Shortly after the next Rec Committee meeting, committee members are going to meet at the site to gameplan the schedule of activities. All of this is possible because Oceanport resident Michael Abboud is making the space in front of Russel Hall available and will be providing the lights for the big tree in front of Russel Hall. Lots more information about the event will be coming out in the very near future and details can be found on page 2.

Netflix is moving forward with its purchase of close to 300 acres of property in the Eatontown and Oceanport sections of the former Fort Monmouth site and we expect them to be presenting Phase 1 of the project to the Oceanport Planning Board in November. If all goes as planned, Netflix's first four sound stages will be built in Oceanport on the McAfee Center property across from the Fort Athletic Club. Coordination between FMERA and Oceanport in furtherance of this amazing redevelopment project has been fantastic and I want to thank FMERA's Executive Director, Kara Kopach, and her incredible staff for their cooperation and open lines of communication with the Borough. Kara and her staff have made a very, very daunting task much easier for Oceanport to administrate.

Development in the Fort Monmouth section of Oceanport is proceeding as planned. With all the focus on Netflix, the continued progress of the Riverwalk Center (the 12-acre commercial development along Oceanport Avenue) and the Parker's Creek residential community (by Pulte Homes) has not gotten enough attention. If you have a chance, take a drive through the Fort Monmouth property and see for yourself how these sites have been transformed and how vibrant this area has become. Something that Oceanport has long needed is a diverse commercial tax base and the combined impact of the Riverwalk Center and Netflix on our tax revenue will be profound and long lasting. As the recently announced closure of Freehold Raceway highlights, horse racing is not the industry it once was in New Jersey and Oceanport's reliance on Monmouth Park as its largest commercial taxpayer will be lessened by these two projects.

Notwithstanding that, Monmouth Park just finished a very successful season and this year's Haskell proved that Monmouth Park can still draw throngs of people. It's important to note the Monmouth Park property will be

undergoing its own transformation as the operators develop alternative means of keeping the site viable. Counting on the State of New Jersey to supplement the purses as they do in other states is a risky proposition at best. Keeping the track open, attracting people to the property by diversifying the type of entertainment offered and maximizing unused or underutilized portions of the track site to their highest and best use, are the immediate goals of the proposed development. Darby Development, which recently secured the long-term lease for the Monmouth Park site from the New Jersey Sports & Exhibition Authority, has been open and upfront about their intentions for the development and the long-term health of Monmouth Park. We are confident relations between the Borough, Darby Development, and the NJSEA will remain collegial, and that Oceanport will continue to have a seat at the table and a voice in the room as the track site develops. If the track does well, Oceanport does well.

Speeding and traffic continue to plague Oceanport and most municipalities in New Jersey. All summer long, Oceanport's police officers have been on our main roads and throughfares stopping speeders and we have installed several more speed control signs in speed sensitive areas throughout the Borough. Many speeding tickets were issued this summer, and our police department is not going to stop issuing them. Now, though, we have a new problem wreaking havoc on our roads: electric bikes. It seems as though every school age kid in town has an electric bike. Compounding the problem is the fact that electric bikes with a maximum speed of 20 MPH do not require a license, registration or insurance, but those that are capable of exceeding 20 MPH do. Keeping up with the various types and classes of electric bikes on the road is a difficult task for both parents and law enforcement.

Drivers in town have voiced their grave concerns about electric bikes to the police and elected officials. We are acutely aware of how prolific the use of electric bikes are by both kids and adults have become on our roadways, and it would seem that we all have first-hand experience with the dangers associated with them. In October, the governing body will be introducing an ordinance designed to restrict their use on our roadways and empower law enforcement to ensure the electric bikes on our roadways comply with the ordinance and applicable state statutes. Keeping our roadways safe is hard enough. Electric bikes make it that much harder. I can assure you this ordinance will go a long way towards reducing the likelihood of a tragedy involving an electric bike. That having been said, given my personal experience with electric bike drivers who seem to think the rules of the road are not applicable to them, I believe we are going to be reading about accidents between cars and electric bikes more and more in the near future. Hate to say it, but every electric bike is an accident waiting to happen.

As I began my message the fall season is upon us and it brings beauty to Oceanport, the cool but not too cool morning air gives a new energy. Oceanport has fun fall family activities like the Trunk n' Treat and do not forget about the Borough's 2nd Halloween Home Decorating contest. Most importantly, the Veteran's Day Ceremony is November 11th at Borough Hall, 10:30 AM is the wreath placement and at 11:00 AM the ceremony will take place inside. We are honored to have Oceanport resident Captain Eric Motzenbecker as our guest speaker. Eric served as a Combat Engineer in the Army 3rd Infantry Division.

Enjoy all that the fall here at the Jersey Shore brings and the upcoming holiday season with family and friends!