

Ideas Exchanged at County Conference of Mayors

VILLAS- Once a month over lunch, mayors of the county's 16 municipalities have the opportunity to share concerns and work together for the greater good of their town and neighboring communities.

The Cape May County Conference of Mayors is not limited just to the top elected officials. Its monthly luncheons are also attended by city managers, deputy mayors, administrators and clerks.

The group also invites county freeholders and state legislators to attend its meetings.

The conference was founded 30 years ago by Lower Township Manager Mike Voll, a former mayor of Middle Township.

"I thought it was very important to communicate with neighboring towns about issues," said Voll. "It was never a Republican or Democrat event, it was just purely good leadership."

He said the meeting allows mayors to discuss mutual issues candidly without media present.

Lower Township Mayor Michael Beck was appointed president of the county Conference of Mayors at a Dec. 13 meeting. West Cape Mayor Pamela Kaithern was presented with a plaque of recognition for serving more than five years as president.

"Mayors deal with the day-to-day problems of towns and it's important for them to be able to talk with other mayors to see how they are handling specific problems," said Beck.

He noted Cape May County has unique challenges not found in other parts of the state. After Hurricane Sandy, local mayors made their voices heard to receive help at the state level to revive tourism, said Beck.

Woodbine Mayor William Pikolycky, a former president of the county Conference of Mayors, said the meetings allow an exchange of information eliminating the need to "reinvent the wheel." When an issue comes along from the county or state level, the county conference of mayors can respond as a group, he said.

"It's a good opportunity to meet with the other mayors that have been there and done that," said North Wildwood Mayor-Elect Patrick Rosenello. "For me just coming in, it's a great opportunity."

Middle Township Mayor Dan Lockwood said the networking opportunities at the county Conference of Mayors were invaluable.

Ocean City Business Administrator Mike Dattilo said municipalities were dealing with the same macro issues. He said it was useful to hear what has been going right and what has been going wrong in neighboring towns.

West Cape Mayor Pam Kaithern said officials get numerous emails from state agencies and commissions but "working side-by-side with other mayors is really helpful."

West Wildwood Administrator Christopher Ridings said the borough is a small community and the conference of mayors offers a learning opportunity from larger towns.

"We can see what has worked and what hasn't worked," he said. "It also provides ideas of shared services for us."

Freeholder Kristine Gabor said the conference gives her an open line of communication to local elected officials.

Stone Harbor Mayor Suzanne Walters, a former president of the conference and new president of the New Jersey League of Municipalities, said provided a forum to exchange ideas.

"Whether we are small or big, every town has the same issues," she said.