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NATION & WORLD, A6

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JONES ROAD FIRE | ONE YEAR LATER

'YOU CAN STILL SMELL THE BURNING TREES'



WAYNE PARRY, STAFF WRITER

This April 20, 2026, photo shows charred pine trees at the edge of an industrial park in Lacey Township that were burned in a forest fire April 22, 2025. The blaze burned 15,300 acres and destroyed one business in an industrial park, but otherwise spared lives and property.

Suspect awaits trial in blaze that burned 15,300 acres in Ocean County

WAYNE PARRY
Staff Writer

LACEY TOWNSHIP — A year later, the smell of charred pine trees still hangs in the air in the industrial park at the edge of the forest just off Route 9 where a huge fire burned more than 15,300 acres and disrupted life in part of the Pinelands for days.

Wednesday marks the first anniversary of the blaze, which officials have nicknamed the Jones Road fire for a landmark near where it began.

The fire broke out April 22 in Waretown and quickly spread north to Lacey Township, chasing 7,000 people from their homes.

It was the largest forest fire in New Jersey in the past 20 years.

A 20-year-old Waretown man is awaiting trial, charged with setting wooden pallets ablaze in the woods, touching off the fire that

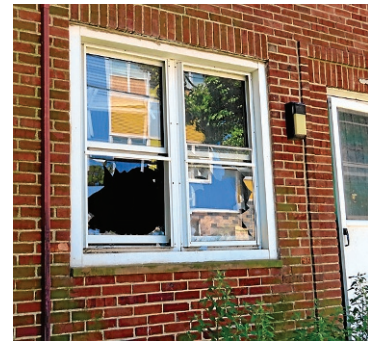
forced the closure of the Garden State Parkway, Route 9 and numerous local roads.

The fire destroyed an awning business in the industrial park but otherwise spared lives and buildings.

"It was like a nightmare," said Steve Martin, who owns Top Coat Paving, a business in the industrial park directly next to one that was incinerated by the fire. "I was eating dinner at my home, which is five minutes away, and we saw the smoke from the fire had shifted. My wife said, 'You better go check on the building.'"

Please see **FOREST FIRE**, Page A3

VIEW: To look back at photos from the fire, point your smartphone camera at the QR code, then tap the link.



HUD finds funds for AC Housing Authority.
LOCAL, A2



Is A.J. Brown leaving the Eagles?
SPORTS, B1



What's eating US cattle numbers?
360, C1

Small sets \$750,000 goal for inaugural gala

HARAM SHAHID
Staff Writer

ATLANTIC CITY — Mayor Marty Small Sr. knows the city's nonprofits have "bills to pay," and he's aiming to raise \$750,000 to help pay them at his 2026 inaugural gala.

Plans for the gala were announced Monday at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City. The ball will be held May 30 in the Hard Rock Live at Etes Arena during the city's Soar & Shore Airshow weekend.

Small won reelection in November with 62.5% of the vote, defeating Republican Naem Khan 4,748 to 2,851.

Small said he plans to keep applying pressure to people for donations to meet their goals.

The previous gala, in 2022, raised \$611,000, surpassing its original \$500,000 goal.

This year, he is pushing for \$750,000, with the possibility of raising that target even higher.

Please see **GALA**, Page A3

VIEW: For video from Small's inaugural gala announcement, point your smartphone camera at the QR code, then tap the link.

AC artists find it tough to make a living locally

HARAM SHAHID
Staff Writer

ATLANTIC CITY — There seem to be two choices young creatives in the area have when it comes time to pursue their dreams full time: Should they move to New York City or somewhere closer to it?

Many young artists working in the city hoping to make a living often find themselves riding on buses, going beyond state lines just to find a table to set their work on.

If they're lucky, there will be chairs, too.

The alternative is to stay local, where limited studio

space, high rental costs and a lack of consistent creative infrastructure make it difficult for artists and small business owners to live, create, sell their work and build sustainable careers locally, even as some leaders point to growth and long-term potential.

"It's like our struggle is being capitalized off of," said J'Andra Ahmad, 33, of Mays Landing. "Cities are usually supposed to be these great, opportunity-filled places for artists. But in Atlantic City, there's no space, there's no

Please see **ARTISTS**, Page A3



Break out the air fryer for this chicken sandwich.
LIVELY, D1

Inside

Business	A9, C5	Corrections	A2	Opinion	A7-8	Weather	A10
Classified	B7-12	Lively	D1-6	Sports	B1-6	360	C1-6
Comics	D3, 5	Obituaries	A9	TV	D4		

Weather

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FORECAST • A10

