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Beach just as big a headliner at Barefoot

JACOB ERLBAUM
For The Press

WILDWOOD — The iconic Morey's Pier and its scenic backdrop surrounding the Wildwood beach made for a picture-perfect experience at the Barefoot Country Music Festival.

On Saturday, country music artist Holdyn Barder, of Stone Harbor, performed on the Patron Stage and greeted fans for pictures and autographs after his performance.

While on stage, Barder talked about his love and familiarity of Wildwood and the scenes around the beach. Bob Durkin, a co-founder of the festival, agreed.

"We consider the beach like our fifth headliner," Durkin said. "We saw this, and it was just magical. We saw it during the day and thought, you know, it has enough beach for us to be able to do the festival on and then at nighttime, the way the Morey's Pier comes alive with

those neon lights and the amusement parks, it's like a trip through time. And it really is amazing backdrop for a country music festival."

Over 40 artists, including some of the top country artists from around the United States, are performing this weekend. Saturdays' top artists included Jason Aldean, Chris Janson and Philadelphia's own Boyz II Men, headlining a lineup of over a dozen artists on the day.

To celebrate the festival's fifth year, five headliners for the event were selected, according to a release from the festival. The headliners included Rascal Flatts, who performed Thursday, Lainey Wilson (Friday), Jason Aldean (Saturday) and Jelly Roll and Jordan Davis, who will both close out the festival Sunday.

Durkin reflected on the big names and other artists for this year's event.



JACOB ERLBAUM, FOR THE PRESS

Holdyn Barder, of Stone Harbor, signs an autograph for a fan after performing on the third day of the Barefoot Country Music Festival on Saturday in Wildwood.

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A PLACE TO RUMBLE



PATRICK MULRANEN, STAFF WRITER

Atlantic City police Chief James Sarkos helps set up the new wrestling mat at the city's Police Athletic League. The city announced Friday evening the formation of the Atlantic City Lions youth wrestling program, which will practice and compete at the north New York Avenue building.

Atlantic City PAL highlights inaugural youth wrestling program with new mat

PATRICK MULRANEN
Staff Writer

ATLANTIC CITY — Edward Balderas Cruz really got into wrestling two years ago, and loves everything about the sport.

"Doing this sport has really taught me perseverance," the 16-year-old rising Atlantic City High School junior said.

"Being able to commit to something, it teaches me a lot of discipline. It has got up my strength, my athleticism, my speed. Basically, it's brought up all the aspects of my life."

That's just what the sport of wrestling does, and the Atlantic City Police Athletic League and Atlantic City Police Department made strides Friday to ensure Balderas Cruz's and many other youth lives continue to strengthen on the mat.

The PAL and ACPD, along with the Atlantic City Police Foundation, donated a new wrestling mat

to the PAL building on New York Avenue. The 40-by-42-foot mat has a giant logo of the newly-formed Atlantic City Lions youth team as well as ACPD and PAL logos at the bottom.

The Lions are the first youth wrestling team in Atlantic City's history, coach Marcus Holmes said. The coed team is expected to have over 50 youth wrestlers of all ages.

"It feels good to bring kids from the community together to have a team," said Holmes, an Atlantic City firefighter who has coached youth wrestlers in the city for three years. He wrestled at Oakcrest High School and then Centenary University.

"Just the youth getting off the streets, traveling," he continued. "We go to all the townships in New



Holmes

"It feels good to bring kids from the community together to have a team. ... It's just a good thing to have them work hard and learn resilience, patience and how to conduct themselves in certain situations."

— Marcus Holmes, Atlantic City Lions coach

Jersey, state tournaments and tournaments all over, so it's just a good thing to have them work hard and learn resilience, patience and how to conduct themselves in certain situations."

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OC group has 'A Better Idea' for Wonderland

Mita pushes City Council proposal to August meeting

BILL BARLOW & JOHN RUSSO
Staff Writers

OCEAN CITY — Ocean City 2050, one of the various organizations opposed to developer Eustace Mita's Boardwalk hotel proposal at the former Gillian's Wonderland amusement park site, held a special meeting Saturday morning to unveil its plans of "A Better Idea."

In a meeting at the Ocean City Free Public Library, the proposal introduced the Wonderland Commons, a modern, multi-use boardwalk village with a smaller amusement park, entertainment, restaurants, a free children's playground and low-rise, rotating food trucks and high-end lodging.

The meeting comes on the heels of Mita, owner of the Icona hotel chain, saying his July-at-the-latest plan to present a Boardwalk hotel proposal to City Council has become August at the earliest.

Mita plans to ask council to designate the former Gillian's Wonderland amusement park an area in need of redevelopment, part of his plans to build a 252-room hotel at the site.

He previously said he would present his plans in March.

The proposal, dubbed Icona at Wonderland, would need either council action or a variance from the city's Zoning Board, because the Boardwalk zone does not allow for hotels.

Mita, who owns the property, as well as a chain of hotels and the Achristavest home building company, held a series of town hall-style meetings over the winter on his proposal for a seven-story hotel with parking underneath and retail and restaurant space along the Boardwalk.

He has estimated the cost of the project at \$150 million.

Plans also call for the preservation of some of the rides from the former Wonderland, which shut its doors at the end of last season. They include the iconic Ferris wheel and carousel.

Mita's plans got a mixed reaction in his unofficial presentations, with plenty of skepticism and questions. Since then, opposition has grown, and gotten more organized, with campaigns opposing any zoning variance and calling the "big hotel a big mistake," as signs around town state.

Critics of the hotel proposal took issue with earlier comments from Mita, in which he contended they were made up of the same 10 or 20 people using the names of various organizations. One of the organizers, Bill Merritt, said earlier this month that thousands of people have joined opposition groups.

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