

Cape, Atlantic buy ad space in Times Square vacated by Toys R Us

BILL BARLOW For The Press

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — Plans to close Toys R Us stores throughout the country have been a blow both in economic terms and emotionally, but it proved to be a boon to Cape May and Atlantic counties, which may get their promotional message in front of millions more people this year.

The Cape May County Division of Tourism made a deal for ad space on a Times Square billboard for a fraction of its market value, Freeholder Marie Hayes announced at a meeting of the county government March 13.

The billboard is at 1500 Broadway, which Hayes said can be seen in the background during the broadcast of ABC's "Good Morning America." A New York Times piece in 2015 indicated about 460,000 pass through Times Square on its busiest days.

"Our director of tourism has once again proven her worth," Hayes said.

Diane Wieland, the county tourism director and public information officer, said Neutron Media contacted her office after Toys R Us pulled its advertising.

"The buy would normally be \$88,050. We're paying \$10,950 and sharing the cost with Atlantic County," Wieland said. The 30-second video ads were produced by Neutron Media with still images provided by the county and will highlight popular aspects of Cape May County including its beaches, ecotourism, wineries and boardwalks. They began to appear Friday and will run three times an hour, 20 hours a day for 108 days.

The digital billboard is 1,624 square feet, wrapping around a corner of the skyscraper to be visible from two sides, Wieland said.

Cape May County officials were happy with the news.

"I've got to tell you something: She just saved us a tremendous amount of money if we could have ever afforded it," said Hayes. "So how cool is that?"

"I'm going to go to New York just to see it," said Freeholder Leonard Desiderio. He suggested a road trip for elected officials to see the ad, and later in the meeting joked that Atlantic County would be jealous if they saw it.

Atlantic County will pick up one-third of the cost of the contract, which totals \$16,900, and one of the three ads each hour will feature Atlantic County.

Wieland said the two counties often work together on regional tourism promotions like the Times Square ad.

"This is an opportunity to highlight what the county has to offer," Wieland said. "I think they realize we have a lot in common."

The local ads will cycle through from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m., joining a sea of digital advertising in Times Square, where numerous large-scale billboards greet the enormous crowds of tourists who visit each day.

The Manhattan landmark combines the center of the Broadway theater district and the New York headquarters of a number of entertainment giants. Times Square runs from 42nd to 47th streets.

Soon after the freeholder meeting, Toys R Us announced plans to sell all 800 U.S. stores, six months after the retailer filed for bankruptcy. There are no Toys R Us locations in Cape May County, but the retailer has locations in Mays Landing, Atlantic City and Vineland.

No closing date has been announced. The closing will cost nearly 33,000 people their jobs. The company is based in Wayne in Passaic County.