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# Bridgeton News



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BRIDGETON, N.J. 50¢

## Attic of Leechester Hall full of critters and...

# Maurice River Twp. batty

By **JEAN JONES**  
Staff Writer

**MAURICE RIVER TWP.** — Bats in the belfry?

Leechester Hall has no belfry, but it does have an attic, one that apparently has been home to a large colony of bats for 20 to 25 years, according to Mayor Ron Riggins.

The colony was found by workers for a contractor hired for renovations and to upgrade to the building, formerly owned by the Leesburg Fire Company but acquired a couple of years ago by the township.

"The workers stopped cold and left the building. It had to be inspected and we found we had to have a specialized person to deal with it," he said.

A contract was awarded Thursday to Balance of Nature, Inc., for \$17,075, and \$11,500 of that is for removal of the guano.

Riggins said a lot of people have become familiar with what guano is in the past few weeks. The bats have left piles of it in the attic.

One of the workers who discovered the bats said they started coming out of holes in the walls when the crew began to run a pipe that had to go through the attic.

"Every time we started to hammer they would come out. They were flying around our heads," said one worker.

When the men went into the attic, there were piles of guano between a foot and 2 feet high under the places the bats had roosted and a strong smell of ammonia.

They left.

A worker at the road department garage next door said the bats had been there since he was a kid.

"They will have to wear protective clothing," Riggins said of the removal crew. "Bats breed from August to October and the babies

don't leave. Those bats will have to be hand-plucked!"

He said there are 300 to 400 of them. Bats are a protected species and there is a \$3,000 fine for each bat killed.

He jokingly suggested an "adopt-a-bat" program for residents, maybe not such a bad idea, since bats eat insects.

The local species are mostly little brown bats, which can eat up to 500 mosquitoes an hour during their nightly flights.

Leechester Hall is now being referred to as the Senior/Community Center Annex.

It is to be used for special senior citizen activities and will also be available to local non-profits and residents.

Without air conditioning and needing upgrades, the building needed a lot of work, but the township was not prepared for bats.

Or their guano.



Staff Photo by TERRY HALL

Most of the bats that lived in the old building in Leesburg entered thru this wooden louver at the back of the building. Jerry Malagone is installing screen to direct the bats through a special device.