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NJMC Board Dedicates Observatory to William D. McDowell

LYNDHURST, N.J. – The Board of Commissioners of the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission today dedicated the Meadowlands Observatory to William D. McDowell, first Executive Director of the NJMC.

“Today we acknowledge the legacy of William McDowell, whose foresight helped steer the course of the Meadowlands District away from unregulated, often illegal dumping towards becoming an economic engine of responsible redevelopment and preserved open space,” said Susan Bass Levin, NJMC Chairwoman and Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs. “This observatory is a fitting tribute to a leader who recognized the importance of visionary governance.”

McDowell was appointed Executive Director of the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission (now the NJMC) in 1969, following an Act of State Legislature that established the agency to protect the delicate balance of nature, provide for orderly development, and provide facilities for the disposal of solid waste.

In his lifelong career of public service, McDowell served as North Arlington Councilman, North Arlington Mayor, Bergen County Sheriff, Director of the Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders, and Bergen County Executive. He was a Board Member for Bergen Community College and Bergen Regional Medical Center and member of the Knights of Columbus, Veteran of Foreign Wars and Lions Club.

McDowell passed away on April 30, 2007 at the age of 80. He is survived by sons William Jr. and Matthew, daughters Karen, Laura and Mary, and eight grandchildren.

“William McDowell realized the potential for improving the Meadowlands District. His efforts as the first Executive Director established a framework for regional planning to improve the quality of life for those who live and work here,” said NJMC Commissioner Leonard Kaiser. “For those fortunate enough to know Bill, this tribute is testimony to his vision and resolve to leave things better than they were when he found them.”

The William D. McDowell Observatory, currently under construction, will be the focal point of the 10,000-square foot expansion of the NJMC's Meadowlands Environment Center. Upon its completion in late 2007, the center and observatory will provide increased environmental education and outreach opportunities for more than 20,000 residents and students who visit the MEC each year. The observatory's state-of-the-art telescope will feature an advanced optical guidance system to cut through light pollution and a six-meter retractable dome. The new facility is being constructed to achieve a Gold rating in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). Environmentally-conscious construction and management practices at the facility are the subject of two ongoing Rutgers University studies on green building.

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