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NJMC Opens New Center for Environmental and Scientific Education and William D. McDowell Observatory

LYNDHURST, N.J. – The New Jersey Meadowlands Commission today celebrated a new era in its commitment to education and the environment with the opening the NJMC Center for Environmental and Scientific Education and William D. McDowell Observatory.

“The new Center and Observatory are an important investment in the continued resurgence of the Meadowlands,” said Joseph Doria, Chairman of the NJMC and Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. “We are dedicated to increasing the educational programming we provide to students and residents within the Meadowlands District and beyond.”

The Center demonstrates first-hand the NJMC’s proactive movement in addressing Governor Corzine’s call to combat Global Warming and increase renewable energy sources. The 10,000 square-foot facility, an expansion of the Meadowlands Environment Center (MEC), was built to the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards. The Center’s LEED features include rooftop solar panels, ceiling solar tubes, recycled building material and energy efficient heating, lighting and ventilation systems.

The Center is operated and staffed by Ramapo College of New Jersey, which provides comprehensive environmental education programs for students in grades K-12 that supplement core curriculum content standards taught in schools.

“The Center itself is an example of the conservation lessons that will be taught in the classroom,” said Robert Ceberio, Executive Director of the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission. “As they work students will observe countertops and flooring made of recycled materials, solar panels and tubes that help power the building, and lights that switch on and off when they enter and leave classrooms.”

The Center also offers are also summer programs for children, programming for seniors, and programs for people living with disabilities,

The William D. McDowell Observatory features a state-of-the-art Classical-Cassegrain telescope with a 20-inch mirror and advanced research equipment housed in a six-meter retractable dome. The Observatory is named for the NJMC’s first Executive Director.

“It is a great honor to officially open this outstanding facility which is named for such an outstanding man who devoted so much of his life to improving the public good,” said NJMC Commissioner Leonard Kaiser, a friend of the McDowell family. “I know I speak for his family and the many people whose lives William McDowell touched when I say that this is a fitting tribute for a man whose legacy of public service will long be remembered.”

In addition to his role with the NJMC, McDowell, who died last April at age 80, was also the first Bergen County Executive and a North Arlington Mayor, Bergen County Sheriff, Director of the Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders, and North Arlington Councilman.

All ends of the educational spectrum will be served by the Observatory, from grade-school students taking in the wonders of the universe through a telescope for the first time to students working on graduate theses and professors conducting research for publication.

The Observatory will also serve as a catalyst for sparking general public interest in astronomy and science. Public viewing sessions, coordination with local astronomy clubs, and a mentorship program are planned.

The telescope contains special filters to minimize light pollution for the best possible viewing experience and is capable of viewing objects millions of light years away. It also includes specialized cameras that can photograph an array of astronomical objects; a photometer that measures the brightness of stars and studies their changes over time; and a spectroscope to analyze light wavelengths and determine the chemical composition of light-emitting objects.

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