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## Former Governors Gather at NJMC to Discuss Meadowlands History and Future

**LYNDHURST, N.J.** – The New Jersey Meadowlands Commission (NJMC) kicked off a yearlong celebration of its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary today with a roundtable discussion featuring former Governors Richard J. Codey, Donald T. DiFrancesco, and James J. Florio on the past, present and future of the Meadowlands. The NJMC’s Executive Director, Robert Ceberio, opened the historic program, which was moderated by NJN Producer and Environment Reporter Ed Rodgers.

“For 40 years the Meadowlands has been the grand experiment in regional planning,” said Ceberio, who grew up in North Arlington, in the Meadowlands District. “It is now a vibrant economic engine with an environment that is making a miraculous recovery.”

The NJMC – initially named the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission – was created by a legislative act that took effect on Jan. 13, 1969. The Commission’s initial mandate was to cleanup, revitalize, and, where appropriate, develop thousands of acres of landfills and wetlands that had been scarred by illegal dumping and neglect.

“The progress that the NJMC has made in revitalizing the Meadowlands over the past four decades has been remarkable,” said Joseph Doria, Chairman of the NJMC and Commissioner of the state Department of Community Affairs. “The Commission has literally changed the face of the region in a way that few thought possible.”

Former Gov. Codey, who is now the state Senate President, recalled as a teenager the stink of driving along Route 3 on the way to New York. He said the Meadowlands then was a far cry from the thriving economic and environmental landscape that defines the region today.

“Its incredible what’s happened in this area in the past 40 years, without question,” Sen. Codey said. “The work done by this Commission, over 40 years, has allowed this area to grow in ways we could never imagine back in ’69.”

Over the past four decades the Commission has played a major role in the environmental restoration and economic growth of the Meadowlands, while expanding its own goals and initiatives. Under the NJMC's leadership, thousands of acres of wetlands and open space have been remediated and preserved, seven parks have been developed and nearly 10 miles of trails set aside within the District. Meanwhile, development within the Meadowlands has brought nearly \$2 billion in tax revenue to the 14 District municipalities.\*

In 2001, the agency's name was changed to reflect an evolution of its mission, and in the years that followed, the NJMC refocused on redeveloping existing land – instead of filling wetlands for development – and protecting the open areas that remained. Today the Commission is a leader in environmental preservation, sensible land use policy, and sustainability efforts, especially renewable and alternative energy initiatives. The NJMC also conducts scientific research and offers a wide array of educational programming to tens of thousands of school children and residents of all ages each year.

Former Gov. Florio, who also represented New Jersey in Congress, stressed the importance of the Commission's efforts to balance development with environmental preservation. He specifically cited the NJMC's initiatives involving the use of renewable and alternative energy sources.

“The generation of energy is important for economic growth, but it's also important that we do it in a way that is benign to the environment,” Florio said. “There are models of alternative energy projects here that are very important to the state.”

Former Gov. DiFrancesco, who also served as Senate President during his 25-year tenure in Trenton, said the Meadowlands is an exceptional region not only in New Jersey but throughout the entire country.

“New Jerseyans still don't know and appreciate what's been done here,” DiFrancesco said. “Environmentally and economically, it's unique in the country.”

DiFrancesco also praised the NJMC's efforts to make the Meadowlands more accessible to mass transportation, an issue he championed while in office.

“I'm proud to see this being implemented,” DiFrancesco said.

The NJMC has planned several 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary events in the coming months, including nature and birding walks, lectures, a slide show, and an oral history program. Click on the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary section of the Commission's Web site, [www.nj.meadowlands.gov](http://www.nj.meadowlands.gov), for more information and to get involved.

\*The Meadowlands District includes parts of Carlstadt, East Rutherford, Little Ferry, Lyndhurst, Moonachie, North Arlington, Ridgefield, Rutherford, South Hackensack and Teterboro in Bergen County, and Jersey City, Kearny, North Bergen and Secaucus in Hudson County.

