



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

NEWS RELEASE

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Gov. Whitman Addresses State Firemen's Association; Announces Plan to Build Convention Center in Wildwood

Wildwood will be the site of a new convention center that will be run by the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority, Gov. Christie Whitman announced today during a speech to the New Jersey State Firemen's Association.

"This new center will be a win-win situation for the Firemen's Association, the Wildwoods and New Jersey," Gov. Whitman said.

The new convention center will be a 72,000-square foot facility that will bring conference and entertainment events to the city.

The New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority will design, build, operate and maintain the new convention center and assume ownership and management of the city's existing convention centers. The Greater Wildwood Tourism Improvement Development Authority will continue to be responsible for promoting Wildwood tourism.

The Sports and Exposition Authority has successfully undertaken many similar major projects. These include the Meadowlands Sports Complex, the Rutgers University football stadium, the New Jersey Aquarium, and the Atlantic City Convention Center.

"With the Sports Authority operating both the Wildwood and Atlantic City convention centers, a new era of regional tourism promotion will be born," said Gov. Whitman. "This new cooperation will enhance the Wildwoods as a destination resort."

Funding sources for the convention center include:

- A \$10 million low-interest loan from the Economic Development Authority

- \$20 million in proceeds from the current dedicated 2 percent tourism sales tax
- Proceeds from the issuance of Sports Authority contract bonds.

Gov. Whitman made the announcement as she addressed the New Jersey State Firemen's Association at their annual meeting. "The convention center will indeed be a place where the Firemen's Association can present and honor the service of all firefighters in our state," said Gov. Whitman.

The Governor vowed her continued support to strengthen laws to protect firefighters. In June, she signed three new laws that raised the penalties for arson.

The first law subjects an arsonist to a maximum 10-year prison term, the second elevates the crime to a crime of the first degree when it targets a place of religious worship and the third, increases the penalties and sentences for anyone who deliberately starts a fire or causes an explosion that maims or injures any emergency squad member.

"Firefighters are no strangers to the devastating effects of crime," Gov. Whitman said. "Arson, one of the most deadly and destructive forms of crime, ruins lives.

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