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NEWS RELEASE

Governor Distributes Homestead Rebate Checks; Presents \$500,000 Grant for Hamilton Senior Center

Gov. Christie Whitman today demonstrated her commitment to providing property tax relief and meeting the needs of senior citizens when she distributed Homestead Rebate checks to senior citizens and presented a state appropriation of \$500,000 for a new senior center in Hamilton Township, Mercer County.

"Today, New Jersey's 1.4 million men and women over the age of 60 are a vital part of making our state all it can be," the governor said. "Our seniors are one of our fastest growing populations."

"As longevity redefines our concept of aging, we must take a closer look at our communities, and ensure that older adults are part of that community experience. That means taking a closer look at the services we're providing to ensure they meet the needs of people at the dawn of the new millennium," she said.

The Governor said meeting the needs of senior citizens was why the state set up one New Jersey EASE toll-free number - 1- 877-222-3737 - to make it easier for seniors to find services, including respite care and assisted living.

Also, to provide property tax relief for seniors, the Governor earlier this year signed legislation that freezes property tax bills at last year's amount for eligible elderly taxpayers.

Gov. Whitman said under the NJ SAVER tax relief program enacted this year, every senior who now gets a homestead rebate check will continue to get that check, or a check from the Saver Program, whichever amount is larger. The NJ SAVER Program will deliver \$1 billion in direct property tax relief through annual checks to an estimated 1.8 million homeowners, resulting in an average reduction of school property taxes of about 33 percent.

It will be phased in over five years, with the first year's check averaging \$120. At the end of the five-year phase-in period checks will average about \$600.

Approximately 1.3 million Homestead Rebate checks, totaling about \$300 million, will be mailed, starting Saturday, July 31, to eligible New Jersey residents for 1998.

The average check for the 1998 Homestead Rebates is \$219.45. Eligible recipients include senior citizens who are 65 or older, residents who are blind or disabled, and those under 65 who earn less than \$40,000. Persons interested in learning the status of their Homestead Rebate checks can call the automated Homestead Rebate Information Line at 1-800-323-4400.

The \$500,000 mock check the Governor awarded to Hamilton Township officials represents a Fiscal Year 2000 budget appropriation for the construction of new senior center. The facility will be located across from the municipal library and police station.

