

## Office of the Governor

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### NEWS RELEASE

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#### **GOVERNOR DECLARES SUMMER 1998 A WINNER FOR NEW JERSEY TOURISM**

Besides the recent victory by the Toms River East American Little League team, there was another home run for New Jersey in summer 1998 -- tourism.

According to Gov. Christie Whitman and the New Jersey Commerce & Economic Growth Commission's informal post-season survey of beaches, realtors, attractions, campgrounds, hotels and highways, excellent weather, water quality and beach conditions all contributed to a banner summer of tourism activity in the Garden State.

"I'm delighted to report that our summer tourism economy has once again experienced another stellar year," said Gov. Whitman. "While last summer's record attendance was hard to beat, this year is as good, if not better, in terms of tourism numbers."

A strong summer tourism season also means more good news for Secretary Gualberto "Gil" Medina of the New Jersey Commerce & Economic Growth Commission. "The link between a strong summer and our overall tourism industry is critical," he said. "In 1997, the Shore contributed more than half of all the tourism expenditures in New Jersey -- or \$14.1 billion of the state's \$25.5 billion. I'm delighted about what our poll found, but based on New Jersey's overall strong economy, it doesn't surprise me."

Following are highlights from the informal survey conducted by the New Jersey Commerce & Economic Growth Commission covering the tourism industry this summer:

#### **SUMMER SHORE RENTALS**

Rentals along the Jersey Shore were as strong as ever with this summer also a busy time for house sales. Last summer's excellent weather and clean water added to this year's success in the rental market as top locations were renewed well in advance. While August is the busiest season to rent, September is still popular for families with young children and senior citizens.

#### **HOTEL/MOTEL BOOKINGS**

Despite a rainy June, hotel and motel owners experienced brisk business thanks to great weather -- as reservations are often made at the last minute (in comparison to booking rental properties). Hotel occupancy in Atlantic City was at a 97 percent occupancy rate this summer versus 92 percent last year, according to the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority. In Cape May, hoteliers reported solid bookings well into September. Some Canadian cancellations were seen because of that country's weakened currency.

#### **BEACH ATTENDANCE**

Beach officials experienced brisk badge sales with numbers at the same level, if not better than last year. In addition to excellent water quality (as cited by the National Resources Defense Council), clean beaches and sunny weather, many officials also attribute the increased attendance to an array of scheduled events in summer and fall.

#### **CAMPGROUND ACTIVITY**

Because of good weather, campground activity also experienced a busy summer with strong bookings. Campground officials found most of interest was from families with young children; bookings from families slow down after Labor Day but are replaced by the senior citizen market. Fewer Canadians went camping because of a decline in that country's exchange rate.

**HIGHWAY VOLUME**

Overall increases in transportation volume were reported by authorities from the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway. And Labor Day is expected to break all previous records in terms of volume. The New Jersey Turnpike also attributed increased traffic as a result of a strong economy. According to the Garden State Parkway, August typically is its busiest travel period; this July already surpassed last year's August records by an average of three percent.

But Gov. Whitman added, "The benefits of this summer, both economic and quality of life, are not over yet in New Jersey." While summer might traditionally end after Labor Day, this period begins what the Governor refers to as New Jersey's "second summer" at the Shore, known for its mild weather and ocean water, few or no crowds and relaxed pace.