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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR CITES GAINS IN NEW JERSEY TOURISM INDUSTRY; ANNOUNCES \$50,000 GRANT FOR TOURISM WEB PAGE

Tourism continues to thrive in New Jersey, with 1998 travel expenditures setting a new mark at \$26.1 billion, according to research released today by Gov. Christie Whitman at the 1999 Governor's Conference on Tourism.

"I am delighted that tourism in New Jersey is expanding as part of our soaring economy," the Governor said. "Last year, we prepared a blueprint for New Jersey's tourism growth well into the new millennium. These new growth figures reinforce our commitment to design new initiatives with our industry partners to attract more visitors to our destination."

Gov. Whitman noted that 633,000 jobs were supported by the tourism industry in 1998 - an increase of 10,000 jobs from the previous year. In addition, tourism wages for 1998 rose to \$13.1 billion from \$12.9 billion in 1997.

The Governor also announced that she was providing \$50,000 from her discretionary funds to upgrade the state's tourism promotion on the Internet.

"I pledge today to turn New Jersey's tourism page into the most attractive, useful, and inviting state tourism web page in America by the start of the summer season," she said. "We will have a page that makes people proud; more important, it will be a site that makes people visit."

"We need to build on the success that the tourism industry has enjoyed over the past five years," Gov. Whitman said. "An industry that generated \$18 billion before I took office now generates over \$26 billion. "What's more, our 'Perfect Together' ad campaign last year had a solid impact on travelers in our region," she said. "I also note that total spending by overnight visitors went up by five percent. I think we can do better than that."

To help market overnight visits to the state, the Governor said, the state's Commerce and Economic Growth Commission has established Team New Jersey USA. Emphasizing the teamwork concept, Team New Jersey USA will involve conventions bureaus, airlines, hotels and restaurants, tourism associations, attractions, and state agencies working together to promote the state domestically and internationally.

"While some people make virtual visits by computer, others may get their first glimpse of New Jersey through our TV and print ads," she said. "I think our 'Perfect Together' campaign reflects the state well. We hit the airwaves last year with our new TV spots, and the data shows that awareness and interest increased significantly. We can be releasing the new ads nationally and locally next month."

The Governor said in the past year nine visitors centers have been opened, welcoming some 3.2 million tourists. She said while tourism promotion still focuses on New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania, the state has extended its reach into New England and the mid-Atlantic states. She said the Tourism Office is participating in more trade shows, including North Carolina's and Virginia's Motorcoach Associations.

"I should add that, earlier this month, I did my part for outreach by hosting a tourism reception in Sao Paulo, Brazil," Gov. Whitman said. "Once South American economies rebound, this will be an increasingly important market, especially since their winter is our summer."

The Governor and Commerce Commission Secretary Gualberto Medina honored eight New Jersey tourism-related businesses for their contributions New Jersey's burgeoning economy in 1998.

The 1999 Governor's Tourism Economic Development Award winners include Club Hotel & Suites by Doubletree in Jersey City; Anthony C. Macrie-Cape May Seashore Lines, Inc. in Cape May; Mountain Creek in Vernon; Nassau Broadcasting Partners in Princeton; the New Jersey Children's Museum in Paramus; A. F. Petrocelli, President, CEO and Chairman of Prime Hospitality Corp. in Fairfield; Six Flags Great Adventure & Wild Safari in Jackson, and the Towne of Historic Smithville & the Village Green in Smithville.

The theme of this year's tourism conference in Atlantic City, which was attended by several hundred industry professionals, was "Team New Jersey USA - Partners in Success." The conference was jointly sponsored by the New Jersey Commerce and Economic Growth Commission and the New Jersey Travel Industry Association.

"New Jersey's tourism industry continues to be an economic powerhouse," said Commerce Secretary Medina. "The bottom line is that more visitors spending money year-round in New Jersey contributes to our entire economic picture, leading to more jobs and an enhanced quality of life for all New Jerseyans. Clearly, a robust tourism industry conveys and even stronger image of New Jersey as an ideal place to live, work and play."