

Office of the Governor

PO BOX 004
TRENTON, NJ 08625

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Jayne O'Connor
Gene Herman
609-777-2600

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Governor Signs Legislation Designating A. J. Meerwald as State Tall Ship; Participates in Water Testing Project

Gov. Christie Whitman today signed legislation designating the A. J. Meerwald, a 70-year-old Delaware Bay schooner, as the New Jersey State Tall Ship. In observance of Earth Week, the Governor also participated in a water testing project as part of the Delaware River Basin Commission's (DRBC) Water Snapshot '98 project.

"The Meerwald, a Delaware Bay Oyster Schooner, comes to us from another period of time in New Jersey history," Gov. Whitman said. "A time when sailing vessels like the Meerwald were the backbone of this region's economy and culture."

"The Meerwald embodies all that makes New Jersey special; quality materials, and quality design, and quality craftsmanship," the Governor said.

The state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is sponsoring environmental educational sailing trips aboard the ship in Burlington City during Earth Week.

"Activities like this sailing classroom are being used, along with local workshops, to educate the public about New Jersey's watersheds," said DEP Commissioner Bob Shinn. "We want to involve people in the planning process to protect our vital water resources."

Joining the Governor in testing the Delaware River water were Girl Scouts from Delran High School, Troop 6088 and South Jersey Pines, Region 6. Water Snapshot '98 involves citizens taking test tube samples in waterways in the Delaware River basin to test for chemicals, turbidity and dissolved oxygen. Water Snapshot '98 began last Friday and will continue until Saturday. Following the project, the DRBC will issue a report on the findings.

"Our waterways are essential to our future," Gov. Whitman said. "Last year, we earmarked \$12 million for an 18-month watershed initiatives program. In October of '97, I signed the Watershed Protection and Management Act that establishes a watershed-based approach to managing water quality and pollution control."

"We've been very successful in cleaning up New Jersey's waterways," the Governor said. "And we are now taking the next step as we begin to deal with how we stop 'non-point pollution,' which is when the rain washes the pesticides from our lawns into the local creeks."

"Moving to this next step will mean involving our communities in a partnership to educate all our citizens about how to keep our waterways clean," Gov. Whitman said. "We want to make New Jersey's waters the cleanest in the nation."

A-750, the bill designating the A. J. Meerwald as the New Jersey State Tall Ship, also appropriates \$95,000 for the maintenance and operation of the ship.

The bill was sponsored by Assembly Members Nicholas Asselta (R-Cape May/Atlantic/Cumberland) and John C. Gibson (R- Cape May/Atlantic/Cumberland) and Senators James S. Cafiero (R- Cape May/Atlantic/Cumberland); Raymond J. Zane (D- Salem/Cumberland/Gloucester) and Diane B. Allen (R- Burlington/Camden).

One of hundreds of schooners built along South Jersey's Delaware Bay shore, the schooner was built to meet the needs of the New Jersey oyster fishing industry. The schooner was donated to the Delaware Bay Schooner Project in 1989. The Project has been responsible for the restoration of the ship which it uses as a sailing classroom to promote ecological and historic awareness of the Delaware Bay region.

In 1995, the schooner was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

The Meerwald is available for reduced price 2 1/2 hour public sails for \$15 per person on four evenings -- Wednesday, April 22, through Sunday, April 26 -- at 6 p. m. (no Friday evening sail), and two day-trips on Saturday, April 25, at 9 a. m. and Sunday, April 26, at 10 a. m. Tickets will be sold at the schooner before each sail, and on Friday, April 24, at 5:30 p. m. for advance tickets for Saturday's and Sunday's sails.