(SALEM, NJ)—Freeholder Director Lee Ware today announced that 2008 will be a year marked by consolidation, cooperation, and innovation for Salem County as the County works toward sustainable economic growth, reducing government redundancy through shared services, and reorganizing Salem County government to provide better services at a lower cost.

“Salem County is a great place to live, work, and play and we must continually work to ensure that we remain viable for generations to come,” said Freeholder Director Lee Ware. “In order to maintain our viability we must continue our aggressive economic development efforts in the areas of business recruitment and retention, as well as tourism.”

In 2007, the Board of Chosen Freeholders contracted with Lee Tofanelli & Associates to develop a three year marketing plan to increase tourism in the County. In 2006, the County ranked last in tourism dollars with $82.2 million spent. This represents only 0.1% of the County’s economy.

“We are at the bottom of the list when it comes to tourism revenue,” said Freeholder Beth Timberman, Chair of the County Planning and Transportation Committee. “We seek to bolster our standing in the tourism community through a coordinated approach which we believe the marketing plan will help develop. With over 500 hours of interviews, the marketing plan will give us a broad perspective of how to market what makes Salem County great. Increasing tourism dollars will increase money flow into the County which will create jobs and lower the tax burden without adversely affecting our quality of life.”

The Salem County Board of Chosen Freeholders will be enlisting the support of federal/state/local officials, along with businesses and private citizens to move Salem County forward in bolstering tourism revenue. Another area that the Freeholders are enlisting cooperation is in the area of shared services.

“Common sense government requires that if it can save money and maintain or improve services then we need to do it,” said Deputy Director David T. Lindenmuth. “We are currently exploring, through a feasibility study, the possibility of merging municipal courts and creating a county-wide police force. While we are looking at these two options right now, all options for shared services are on the table. Shared services allow us to eliminate government redundancy and work together to lower the tax burden to our residents.”

Government Strategies Group has been hired by the County to obtain grant money from the State to conduct the feasibility studies in cooperation with the municipalities. The studies will indicate whether these options are right for Salem County in that they will both improve services and reduce costs.

“In addition to eliminating government redundancy we must work to hold down costs by streamlining County government,” said Freeholder Charles Sullivan, Chair of the Finance Committee. “We have instituted a hiring freeze and a modified zero-based budgeting

approach to hold down the increase in the County budget, even while we are faced with the burden of increased fixed cost. Our residents want the best bang for their buck and we are going to deliver."

While the Board of Chosen Freeholders seeks to reduce costs they do not want to do it at the expense of the programs that many people rely upon and the services that County government offers. The hiring freeze allows the County to reallocate resources without eliminating services.

"Roads and bridges have to be maintained for the safety of our residents and to provide the infrastructure to support healthy economic growth," said Freeholder Bruce Bobbitt, Chair of the County Public Works Committee. "We are working with the engineers and construction crews to have our projects move forward ahead of schedule and under budget. By improving our efficiency we can improve our effectiveness in holding down costs."

Salem County seeks to move forward without leaving anyone behind. This past year, the County instituted free flu shots for residents and an immunization program for children without health insurance. Additionally, the Office for the Disabled and the Office of Aging sponsored several seminars addressing emergency preparedness for our disabled and senior population.

"An effective government is one that is responsible in addressing the economic and social needs of its residents," said Freeholder Jeffrey J. Hogan, Chair of the County Health and Social Services Committee. "We are working to make sure that the vulnerable populations in our County which are our children, disabled, and senior citizens, are never left behind and have the resources they need to have a happy and productive life."

As the County seeks to move forward on economic and social fronts the need for long term planning as become very apparent. Accordingly, the Salem County Board of Chosen Freeholders has started a three-year strategic planning process that will ensure Salem County's success for future generations.

"Government tends to be reactive and we have decided that we are going to be proactive in addressing the concerns that confront us today and what we are anticipating will confront us tomorrow," said Freeholder Director Ware. "By working together as a team, we will strengthen our assets and reduce our liabilities for long term sustainability. Strategic planning will help us ensure that we are moving forward to a common vision to make Salem County the best that it can be."