SALEM COUNTY PROGRESS REPORT:

Prosperity, Progress, and Promise

(SALEM, NJ)—Freeholder Director Lee Ware today announced that Salem County is entering into a new era of "prosperity, progress, and promise" by combining aggressive preservation initiatives with innovative economic development measures. Using this unique approach to government, Salem County has been able to secure the largest surplus in modern history amounting to over \$17.9 million which will be used to provide property tax relief.

"Salem County is moving forward on many fronts which is providing for expanded economic opportunities for our residents while preserving our way of life for future generations," said Director Ware. "Our approach to government does not deal with being a 'big' or 'small' government; rather, it has everything to do with being an effective government that best addresses the needs of the people and is cost effective."

This past year, the Board of Chosen Freeholders enacted a two cent property tax reduction and Director Ware promises that more relief is on the way. While the voters of Salem County rejected a proposal to increase the farmland preservation tax, the Freeholders are working to unveil a budget that uses surplus to continue the aggressive preservation initiatives that has earned Salem County the recognition of being second in the state in regards to preserved farmland.

"This past year was a milestone year for Salem County as we celebrated preserving our 20,000th acre of farmland," said Freeholder Beth Timberman, liaison to the County Open Space Committee. "Farmland and Open Space are important to our residents but we also know that so is their hard earned money. We are going use the surplus and invest in Salem County's future by funding the preservation efforts at no additional cost to the tax payer. Our Farmland and Open Space Plan that we developed this past year will assist us in investing the money effectively."

The Freeholders' focus on coordination and planning is not just limited to farmland, but also to their desire to share services to give real property tax relief to County residents. The County's Public Safety Committee has facilitated interlocal agreements with a number of municipalities to have centralized police dispatching from the County 9-11 center.

"Sharing services streamlines government to be more efficient and cost effective," said Freeholder Lindenmuth. "By combining our dispatch services we can ensure that we have consistency in providing excellent services to our residents. In addition to the dispatching services, we are currently exploring the feasibility of merging municipal courts under the County umbrella which would save a tremendous amount of money to the tax payer."

Sharing services and using the surplus allow for immediate and short-term property tax relief; however, Freeholder Beth Timberman believes that the County needs to continue

to work on developing and strengthening the infrastructure to support economic development.

"One of the most valuable assets to our County is the railroad which runs from Swedesboro to the Port in Salem," said Freeholder Timberman, Chair of the County Planning and Transportation Committee. "We have been very successful in securing outside funds to renovate the rail line to support modern demands. However, the wells of outside money are drying up as we have been very successful in moving this project forward. We are currently working to secure additional funding through Federal and State agencies because we know that this railroad is an important element of the continued success of our economic development initiatives."

The County celebrated an important economic development benchmark with the groundbreaking of the Gateway Business Park in Oldmans Township. The first tenants of the park, the Berkowitz Company, is set to open this spring and bring 250 new jobs to the County.

"We are seeing the benefits of a coordinated focus on Smart Growth within the I-295 Corridor with the Gateway Business Park Project moving forward," said Deputy Director Bruce Bobbitt, Chair of the County Public Works Committee. "We are continuing the tap the power of the County's transportation corridor to ensure continued success of our economic development initiatives like the Gateway Business Park."

While the County has moved forward on a variety of fronts, the Freeholders are mindful of the need to honor and remember the past. 2006 marked the beginning of a new tradition for the Freeholders with the introduction and awarding of the Salem County Military Service Medal Ceremony to over 300 residents.

"Freeholder Sullivan was and is a driving force behind the Salem County Military Service Medal Ceremony which has been an overwhelming success," said Deputy Director Bobbitt, a Vietnam veteran. "The medals, in addition to the naming of the Veterans Memorial Bridge of Salem County with the help of our Third District legislators, are all fitting tributes to those who have sacrificed for the freedoms that we have in this country."

2006 was a year of tremendous successes for the County of Salem. Freeholder Director Lee Ware attributes the successes to the teamwork mentality that pervades Salem County, but warns that we must not become complacent.

"There is more work to be done to ensure that progress continues so that the prosperity of the County becomes a promise to all of its residents now and in the future," said Director Ware. "We will continue to work together as we continue to strive to make Salem County the best that it can be."