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REPORT TO MEMBERS *By Philip Kirschner, President*

New Good Neighbor Award Employers Bucking the Recession

The economic news seems to get worse every day. The stock market falls. Real estate drops. Construction dries up. And unemployment rises. There is no question that New Jersey and the nation are in the midst of one of the worst recessions in history. But you would never know it by looking at the entrants to the New Jersey Business & Industry Association's New Good Neighbor Award program.

In mid March, I joined an independent panel of judges to select the 2009 New Good Neighbor Award winners. The awards recognize outstanding commercial real estate developments and renovations based on architectural merit, community involvement and job creation. But commercial real estate, like the residential housing market, went into recession even before the broader economy, so I was not expecting a strong showing of applications.

Boy, was I surprised.

More than 45 projects were submitted for consideration, one of the larger pools of entrants in the 49-year history of the program.

The applicants have cleaned up toxic waste on contaminated properties, converted old landfills into useful facilities and renovated dilapidated abandoned buildings. They created shopping centers, distribution facilities, banks and offices. They expanded education facilities and employed the latest green building techniques.

Each project improves the quality of life in its community by making it more attractive, providing jobs or offering services to area residents. When you add them all together, their contribution to our economy is eye-popping. These projects invested more than \$1 billion in construction and supported nearly 20,000 construction jobs. And the facilities they created employ 6,900 people in permanent jobs.

All of this was accomplished while the economy was contracting at its fastest rate in 26 years.

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In many ways, this year's entrants are no different than past years. Every year since 1960, we have honored eight to 10 such projects that have beautified their areas, created jobs, generated new local tax revenues and benefited their communities. The goal of the program is to highlight the many positive contributions businesses make, not just to the economy, but to society as a whole.

As we struggle through these tough economic times, it's encouraging to see how resourceful business can be. Business leaders are resilient and always seem to find ways around obstacles to overcome adversity to keep their businesses going. We are going to need that kind of ingenuity and determination to pull us out of the economic doldrums.

In the meantime, I encourage everyone to learn more about the winning projects by attending the New Good Neighbor Awards luncheon on June 5 at the Woodbridge Hotel & Conference Center in Iselin. The program will include a short slide show presentation of each winning project. To register, contact Katie Wittkamp at 609-393-7707, ext. 239.

Congratulations to our New Good Neighbor winners and to all of the nominees for their outstanding projects.

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