



Steve Kalafer (left), chairman of NEW JOBS' President's Club, and **James Kirkos**, president of the Meadowlands Regional Chamber of Commerce, at last year's "Night at the Races" Legislative Reception at the Meadowlands.

50 Years of Supporting Pro-Business Candidates

Because of the economy, the largest and most effective employer political action committee (PAC) in the state is more important now than ever.

By Anthony Birritteri, Editor-in-Chief

Since 1959, the New Jersey Organization for a Better State, better known as NEW JOBS, has been supporting state assembly and senate legislators who actively support economic growth, the creation of private-sector jobs and the lowering of business costs.

While NEW JOBS is an independent PAC, it is supported by the New Jersey Business & Industry Association, Chamber of Commerce Southern New Jersey, Morris County Chamber of Commerce, the Meadowlands Regional Chamber of Commerce and other regional business groups.

The organization has been raising and contributing \$250,000 to candidates on an annual basis these past few years. According to Doug Troast, NEW JOBS chairman and president of Troast Realty Services, Paramus, the PAC is more than just about raising money for pro-business candidates. "Our goal is also to educate candidates on the issues employers face today," he says.

During an election year, NEW JOBS Board of Trustees will interview a variety of candidates across the state, rather than sending them questionnaires to find out where they stand on business issues, especially small business concerns. "We learn a lot about the candidates," Troast explains. "The interviews provide a good opportunity for give and take. Board members get to explain, for

example, why the business climate is difficult in New Jersey, what impact government has on the business climate and what types of policies we believe the Legislature should pursue to improve the business climate and create jobs." If an incumbent is running for re-election, NEW JOBS will review the candidate's past legislative voting record.

Another way political candidates meet business leaders and become educated on business issues is by meeting face-to-face with employers at NEW JOBS receptions held throughout the state. Of six receptions, two are signature events: the South Jersey Legislative Reception and the Meadowlands "Night at the Races" Legislative Reception. The ticket price for both events is \$200 each, while the price for the four smaller events is \$150 each.

This past spring, the 23rd Annual South Jersey reception was held at the Mansion on Main Street in Voorhees. It was attended by 100 businesspersons and 10 lawmakers. Last fall, 114 businesspersons and 14 legislators attended the "Night at the Races" at the Meadowlands. Some legislators included Assembly Speaker Joe Roberts, Senate President Richard Codey, Assembly Minority Leader Alex DeCrose and Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean, Jr. In total, 89 lawmakers attended NEW JOBS events last year.

Troast says NEW JOBS has had success these past few years rolling back the some of the business tax increases implemented by the McGreevey Administration. "We've seen an improvement over the last five years, but we still have a long way to go," he explains.

He says the PAC is also looking to elect employ-

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ers to public office. "If we can get more businessmen and women involved in the political process, that would be a wonderful thing. There are teachers and union representatives in the Legislature. They are representing their constituents, so we need to encourage more private-sector employers to seek office," Troast says.

Commenting on the impact of NEW JOBS is Steve Kalafer, owner of Flemington Car & Truck Country, chairman of the Somerset Patriots minor league baseball team, and chairman of NEW JOBS' President's Club, which consists of the PAC's largest contributors. "I have spoken with other [PAC] organizations around the country and in the state, and NEW JOBS is simply the most influential voice employers can have in making the Legislature and the governor's office understand the importance of job creation. In this current economic climate, with a sea of declining employment, it is even more critical that good quality jobs be created and maintained in New Jersey. The voice of NEW JOBS has to be louder than ever."

When NEW JOBS was formed, it had a five-member board of trustees, a far cry from today's 40-member board. Its first president was George F. Smith, then president of Johnson & Johnson. In a September 1959 article that appeared in *New Jersey Business* magazine on the formation of the PAC, Smith said the candidates eligible for NEW JOBS financial backing "will be those who pledge themselves to good government and are concerned with the need for stimulating the growth of the business community with an attending increase in job opportunities for the state."

Fifty years later, his words are more important than ever. **NJB**



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