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Francis J. Mertz Elected Chairman of Commission on Higher Education

Francis J. Mertz was elected today to serve as chairman of the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education effective July 1, 2004. Mr. Mertz is president emeritus of Fairleigh Dickinson University.

“In November 2003, the Commission, after thorough and sustained dialogue with stakeholders, adopted *A Blueprint for Excellence*. That document, acknowledging the importance of higher education for both the individual and the State, set forth a long-range plan,” said Mr. Mertz. “That plan includes a vision for higher education, seven state objectives, and initial action plans and performance measures. As chair of the Commission, I will work tirelessly with the various constituencies to implement this compact which calls for ‘a significant state investment and a measurable return on that investment by the institutions.’”

Mr. Mertz’s career in higher education spans 40 years. He was president of Fairleigh Dickinson University from 1990-1999 and held various other positions at colleges and higher education organizations in both New Jersey and New York. He also has served on the boards of various business and professional associations and is currently chairman of the board of trustees for the Cusack Care Center.

Mr. Mertz succeeds current chairman, Laurence M. Downes, chairman and chief executive officer of New Jersey Resources Corporation (NJR) and its principal subsidiary, New Jersey Natural Gas Company (NJNG), Wall, New Jersey. Mr. Downes is stepping down as chairman but will continue to serve as a member of the Commission.

“It has been a privilege to serve as chairman of the Commission and to work with its dedicated staff,” Mr. Downes said. “I look forward to my continued involvement as a member of the Commission.”

“Throughout his career, Frank Mertz has distinguished himself as a leader in higher education,” said Mr. Downes. “We will truly benefit from his wise counsel and experience.”

A native of Newark, Mr. Mertz earned a bachelor’s degree from Saint Peter’s College and a law degree from New York University School of Law. He resides in Watchung with his wife. They are the parents of six children.

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