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PVSC Passaic River/Newark Bay Restoration Program Celebrates 10th Anniversary

Newark, NJ – The Passaic Valley Sewerage Commissioner's (PVSC) award-winning Passaic River/Newark Bay Restoration Program celebrates its 10th Anniversary this year with some impressive environmental statistics: 313 organized volunteer clean-ups; 207 organized school group clean-ups 78 shoreline restoration projects, and 7,000 tons of debris removed from the Passaic River and its tributaries.

“A decade ago the Commissioners created this program as part of our enhanced commitment to bettering the environment of the Passaic Valley and as a service to our 48 member municipalities,” said PVSC Executive Director Bryan Christiansen. “The Program has resulted in cleaner, safer, more useable waterfront space for these communities and hundreds of thousands of area residents, as well as improved water quality throughout the region.

“We are proud of the work we've done through the Restoration Program and look forward to many more decades of working with area civic, school and charitable groups to restore the Passaic River to its former glory,” Christiansen added.

“Essex County and the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commissioners' Restoration Program have worked hand in hand to revitalize our waterfront parks and public areas,” said Essex County Executive Joe DiVincenzo. “PVSC's sponsorship of and assistance with community clean ups and educational programs, as well as the professional expertise they have provided through their Restoration Program, has helped raise awareness about the environment and reclaim areas for public use.

“We congratulate the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission and its Restoration Program on its 10th anniversary and look forward to future partnerships that improve our residents' quality of life and continue putting Essex County first,” DiVincenzo added.

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This year, PVSC's Restoration Program has a number of innovative projects slated to further improve environmental conditions and awareness in the region. Among them:

- In keeping with its mission to broaden and improve use and awareness of the Passaic River, PVSC's Restoration Program is sponsoring the first ever Novice Regatta on the river on May 2 at the Kearny Crew House. Novice crew teams from Montclair, Ridgewood, Nutley, Belleville, Kearny and Teaneck high schools will participate in what is the area's only race for novice crew competitors.
- The Restoration team will be working with the New Jersey State Police (NJSP) to clear as many as 30 automobile wrecks from the Passaic River. Using NJSP sonar and divers, the teams will locate the submerged wrecks and PVSC staff will conduct the removal.
- On May 16, the Restoration Program will be co-sponsoring the 5th Annual Passaic River Paddle Relay. The race, which attracts as many as 120 paddlers including Essex County Executive Joe DiVincenzo, starts at Riverbank Park in Newark and ends in Rutherford. The event also includes a nine mile kayak competition.

"I have personally watched the PVSC River Restoration Program staff perform some of the most grueling and seemingly impossible waterway clean-ups, especially those at the top of the Great Falls," said Paterson Mayor Jose "Joey" Torres. "Due to our collaboration, the Mayor's Cup canoe race has been added to the list of activities at the city's annual Labor Day weekend Great Falls Festival and, this year, was awarded the *WAVE Award* by the Association of Environmental Authorities.

"Thanks to the Restoration Program and PVSC, our residents and visitors to our city can enjoy the natural wonder of the Great Falls in all its beauty," added Torres.

"Through the years, Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission's Restoration Program has conducted a number of riverbank cleanups in Fair Lawn, resulting in the removal of many tons of debris," said Mayor Steve Weinstein. "They have been helpful in raising the awareness of the river and have aided in the preservation of a valuable resource. They have also been instrumental in providing our residents access to the riverfront with a 'river walkway' and a boat launch at no cost to the community. And, we appreciate their partnership in our annual regatta."

"For the past 18 years the Town of Kearny has sponsored a Passaic River Clean-up," said Kearny Councilwoman Carol Jean Doyle. "The success of this project is through the support of the PVSC's River Restoration Program. Without this support Kearny could not afford to sponsor this annual clean up. PVSC helps with the planning and implementation of this annual project, we share in this joint effort to make a difference not only with the River but the safety of our Kearny High School Crew Team.

"This is an interlocal agreement working at its best," Doyle added.

In total, PVSC has invested more than \$46 million in this program and the results have been staggering in terms environmental benefit:

- Over 500 volunteer clean-ups and 78 larger scale debris removals conducted by PVSC have resulted in the beautification of more than 27 miles of area shoreline and the removal of more than 5,600 tons of litter and debris.
- Beginning in 2000, PVSC began operating its 50-foot skimmer vessel – *the S.V. Newark Bay* – collecting floating debris, trash and vegetation from the Passaic River and Newark Bay resulting in the removal of over 1,300 tons of floatables.
- In 2002 PVSC was awarded a grant from NJDOT to construct an operations and maintenance facility in North Arlington, allowing the agency to add a smaller skimmer vessel – *the S.V. Passaic Valley* -- to its clean-up fleet. The smaller vessel is able to conduct clean-ups in shallower portions of the Passaic River, greatly expanding the program's reach.
- Since 2002, the Restoration Program has partnered with the NJ Department of Environmental Protection for seven weeks each summer to conduct extensive shoreline clean-ups in Bayonne, Jersey City and Port Newark. These clean-ups remove an average of 500 tons of debris each year.
- In 2004 PVSC's Restoration Program conducted a clean-up and restoration of the historic Paterson raceway system, built in the 1800's to help power the city's many mills and manufacturing plants.
- Also in 2004 and again in 2007, PVSC staff worked with Great Falls hydro electric plant officials to actually "turn off" the falls, diverting its flow so PVSC could conduct a clean-up and shoreline enhancement project in which 167 trees and shrubs were planted on shorelines and public viewing areas at the top of the falls.
- In 2005, the Restoration Program created a mile-long river walk pathway along the Passaic River in Fair Lawn. The walkway, built with the cooperation of the Fair Lawn Board of Education, includes viewing platforms, flora labels on plants and information postings on native wildlife and is used as an "outdoor classroom" by students at the Memorial Middle School.
- In 2007 PVSC, in conjunction with NJDEP, the Passaic & Saddle River Alliance, and other agencies, announced the development of a 32-mile canoe trail along the Passaic River complete with 20-25 launch sites, with PVSC's Restoration Program assisting in clean-ups, debris removals and shoreline restorations to make the trail a reality.
- PVSC's Restoration Program promotes canoe races including the Passaic River Paddle Relay that have been held annually since 2004. The program is also

working with the Great Falls Festival to promote and extend its canoe race from Paterson into neighboring West Paterson, Little Falls and Totowa. The program has also worked with the towns of Fair Lawn and Kearny to develop canoe races on the Passaic as well.

- Last year, the PVSC Restoration Program worked with the towns of Wallington, Lodi and Saddle Brook to remove over 450 tons of debris from the Saddle River to lessen the impact of streambank overflows in this flood-prone area.

Over the years, the Restoration Program has received numerous awards, including:

- Association of Environmental Authorities Wave Award (2009)
- New Jersey Clean Communities Program Clean Water Award (2006)
- New Jersey Clean Communities Council Special Recognition Award (2006)
- New Jersey Association of Environmental Authorities Wave Award
- NJDEP Environmental Excellence Award - Honorable Mention (2003)
- USEPA Region 2 Environmental Quality Award (2003)
- USEPA Clean Water Partner Award (2003)
- USEPA Region 2 Operations & Maintenance Excellence Award (2002)
- Association of Metropolitan Sewerage Agencies Public Service & Education Award (1999)

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In honor of the 10th anniversary of the Restoration Program, members of the media are invited to contact PVSC to arrange a ride-along on one of the agency's skimmer vessels, view any of the program's shoreline clean-ups or restoration projects, and attend one of the agency's sponsored events. For more information, please contact Rich Ambrosino at (609) 394-0888.