

## Warren County Shows Its Stuff at 75th Annual NJAC Conference

By Art Charlton

(ATLANTIC CITY, NJ) – Warren County is among the smaller counties in New Jersey but it had outsized prominence at the 75th Annual Celebration of County Government conducted by the New Jersey Association of Counties in Atlantic City May 6-8, 2026.

Warren County Commissioner James R. Kern III, who was sworn in as the 85th President of NJAC in January, was a constant presence at the conference podium throughout the three-day

event, making speeches, presenting awards, and introducing Gov. Mikie Sherrill for her remarks to the conference, which was attended by more than 750 people coming from all 21 counties in the state.

Kern also was one of four commissioners interviewed by NJ 101.5 Senior Political Director Eric Scott during the Nick Acocella County Leadership Showcase.

Meanwhile, Warren County Planning Director Ryan Conklin was moderator of the breakout session “County Planning: How It Impacts County Government and Policy” and a panelist for the session “The New NJ State Plan and Counties: Perfect Together.”

Warren County Public Information Director Art Charlton received a County Service Award, which NJAC announced was “for being brilliant at his craft and a remarkable career in public service that spanned three impactful and meaningful decades.”

Noting that Charlton is in his 27th year as Warren County’s public information director, Kern said that the long-time county spokesman, who also directs the Explore Warren tourism program, is “passionate about his work, and deeply engaged in the community. His impact has been felt not only here in Warren County, but throughout New Jersey. His dedication to public service and commitment to excellence make him truly deserving of recognition and gratitude for a remarkable career.”

Charlton also helmed the annual meeting during the conference of the NJAC Public Information Officers after serving as president of that association for the past year.

In the final event of the conference, culinary arts students from Warren County Technical School wowed the crowd during the 13th Annual County Vocational Technical School Cook-Off Challenge with their competition entry of Sweet and Smoky Duck Breast on a Sourdough Cracker, served with a hunting theme by the students wearing camouflage aprons and orange hunting caps.

“With Commissioner Kern serving as president, Ryan Conklin being part of two different presentations, Art Charlton receiving a County Service Award, and our talented Warren County Technical School students competing in the annual cook-off, Warren County was well represented at the annual NJAC conference. We had several members of our dedicated county staff learning how to better serve residents and we were able to workshop solutions to pressing issues facing counties across the state,” Commissioner Jason J. Samoski said.

Commissioner Director Lori Ciesla remarked, “Under Commissioner Kern’s leadership the 75th NJAC conference was a huge success. The needs of New Jersey counties are unique and coming together with other elected officials and county professionals in a nonpartisan manner to share ideas and experiences is always a great learning experience.”

As county governments serve as innovators in delivering essential services in a cost-effective manner, playing a vital role in the everyday lives of New Jersey residents, NJAC’s annual conference provides county-level decision-makers with the unique opportunity to share valuable resources and ideas. The conference includes a trade show; a “New County Commissioner Orientation”; meetings for county administrators, finance offices, information technology officers and others to meet with their peers; and some 33 informative workshops on diverse topics including regionalization and shared services, public health, emergency preparedness, new AI tools, energy efficiency and more.

“For 75 years, NJAC has provided counties with a unified voice, and that mission remains as important as ever as we work together to strengthen our communities and better serve residents across New Jersey,” Kern noted, adding, “I am honored to serve as President of this organization and to help carry forward that mission.”



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