

Group seeks to improve road signs to help people touring N.J.

**BETTER
BUT NOT
MORE**

By **TOM BALDWIN**
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TRENTON — New Jersey is trying to find itself, but needs better signs.

The state that hosted pivotal battles of the American Revolution, lit the nation and gave the world baseball, harbored the likes of Woodrow Wilson and Albert Einstein, that drives global commerce, affords safe haven to New York sports teams and lives infamously in "The Sopranos" — the losing-its-gardens Garden State is bereft of a fits-all identity.

Enter a group called **Celebrate New Jersey**, a nonprofit corporation that says its mission is "to create statewide awareness and pride in things 'New Jersey.'"

Or as executive director Karen Hatcher of Freehold describes it. "We want to pull it all together — the history, the art, the museums, everything."

One of the group's latest initiatives is called "wayfinding," a concept where a single chunk of signage tells a motorist what's ahead or what's nearby.

"When signage works," the group says on its Web site, "it helps us move with confidence in unfamiliar locations. Because state, county and local authorities do not coordinate signage in New Jersey, it's often easy to lose the trail when trying to find a particular point of interest."

"We don't want more signage, but better wayfinding," Hatcher said Friday at a symposium on how to develop travel-friendly signs.

New Jersey-native Lance Wyman is now a top-end wayfinding graphic designer whose projects have included the Olympics, Washington Mall and National Zoo, told the symposium about "iconography" — or creating, in a single, simple graphic, the essence of a highway sign's message.

"History, you have it in a lot of places,"

Wyman said of trying to hatch an iconic graphic for New Jersey. "It is probably one of most complex places in the world. . . . Is there a way of simplifying New Jersey?"

Celebrate New Jersey says the group has until August to create the design. That is when the state Department of Transportation plans to shift to new or enhanced signage, which is why the nonprofit group calls this "a prime window of opportunity that won't come again for another 10 years."

Jeff Tittel, executive director of the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club, applauds wayfinding.

"It helps small-town economies, especially when the signs show the way to historic or environmental sites. New Jersey hasn't done this at all well," Tittel said.

William Dressel Jr., executive director of the New Jersey State League of Municipalities, agreed — so long as there are no new costs that must be handled by mayors and councils.

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