

Kean recalls fight to pass New Jersey recycling mandate in 1987

By CAITLIN DINEEN Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, April 25, 2012 12:01 am

GALLOWAY TOWNSHIP — Twenty-five years after signing a bill mandating recycling in New Jersey, former Gov. Thomas Kean recalled how the measure was approved and why it is equally important today.

Kean said the legislation to enforce recycling — which was enacted in April 1987 — was the first of its kind in the country and was not welcomed by many residents and business owners when it first was being discussed.

“It wasn’t a hot thing,” Kean said after the Celebrating 25 years of New Jersey’s Recycling event Tuesday at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. “It took a few years to get that bill through.”

He was the keynote speaker at this year’s event, which featured an assortment of speakers and discussions about the newest recycling technology being developed.

More than two decades after his involvement in shaping the state’s law, Kean — who was New Jersey’s governor from 1982 to 1990 — said he was happy the Garden State was the country’s leader for that type of environmental protection.

“It was not easy,” he said. “When you’re the first, you got to break ground. If you’re right, then you become a leader.”

In 1993, President Bill Clinton created the Office of the Federal Environmental Executive through an executive order. That office, which reports to the federal Environmental Protection Agency, promotes “sustainability and environmental stewardship throughout the federal government operations,” its website says.

Kean said that within a year of the legislation’s approval, about 25 percent of New Jersey’s population recycled. Kean now estimates the figure is closer to 40 percent.

Daniel Douglas, director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton, said it was important for school officials to promote recycling because of its location.

“We’re sitting in the middle of the Pinelands National Reserve,” Douglas said. “We have a special responsibility of stewardship of the environment.”

According to Douglas, the Stockton community, including teachers and students, have been recycling for the past 35 years.

“There was that awareness even back then,” he said.

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