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Philip D. Murphy, Governor
Sheila Y. Oliver, Lt. Governor
Elizabeth Maher Muoio, State Treasurer
James Carey, Acting Executive Director

Media Inquiries:
Missy Gillespie
Communications Manager
PublicInfo@lottery.nj.gov
Phone: (609) 599-5875

50 Years Ago New Jersey Citizens Took a Chance on the Lottery

TRENTON (November 1, 2019) – New Jersey is celebrating the Golden Anniversary of voters approving the establishment of a State Lottery, making New Jersey only the third U.S. state to pass a legal lottery. As part of the 1969 General Election, the measure was wholeheartedly welcomed by an astonishing 81.5% voter approval, making it one of the largest favorable public responses in New Jersey legislative history.

“The goal was to establish a state lottery similar to those conducted in neighboring states and abroad. The New Hampshire and New York Lotteries had been quickly embraced by their communities, and it wasn’t surprising considering what else was happening in the world at the time,” said New Jersey Lottery’s Acting Executive Director James Carey. “American Astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first human to set foot on the Moon in 1969, and later that summer, the Woodstock Festival attracted nearly half a million people for a weekend celebrating music. People were very open to change and possibility.”

Approval of the New Jersey State Lottery occurred in 1969, but it would take until December 16, 1970 for the first lottery ticket to be sold. The ensuing months allowed for the creation of regulations, selection of a Lottery Director, and the formation of a Lottery Commission.

“The original hope was that the lottery would produce in the area of \$12 million annually. There is no way that the voters in 1969 could have foreseen that revenues contributed to the State would exceed \$26 billion over the next 50 years, continuing to make New Jersey a great place to live, work, and raise a family,” Carey continued.

This country has a long history with lotteries stretching back to the original 13 colonies, where lotteries were established to raise revenues to fund schools and universities. In 1823, Congress approved a private lottery with proceeds used to beautify Washington, D.C. However, the love affair with lotteries followed a tumultuous path, with breakups and makeups playing out over the years. By 1910, almost all types of gambling were illegal in the U.S. The first modern state lottery did not appear until 1964 in New Hampshire, followed in 1967 by a second state lottery in New York.

Currently, 45 states and the District of Columbia operate lotteries. There are over 200 lotteries worldwide and the New Jersey Lottery is ranked ninth in U.S. total sales and 23rd in worldwide total sales.

About the New Jersey Lottery

Since its inception in 1970, the Lottery has contributed more than \$26.8 billion to the State. As its fifth-largest revenue producer, the Lottery is a significant economic engine for New Jersey, helping to bolster the public employee pension system for teachers, police and fire personnel and other public employees, as well as supporting businesses and communities throughout New Jersey. As a sign of its commitment to responsibly play, the New Jersey Lottery achieved the World Lottery Association’s Level 4 Certification in Responsible Gaming. This certification is the most comprehensive measure of responsible play among lotteries in the industry. The New Jersey Lottery was first granted this certification in 2016 and will continue to uphold the most thorough and complete responsible gaming initiatives for the entirety of the Lottery’s tenure.