

Codey gives boost to Greystone preservation effort

By Lawrence Ragonese
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

The 133-year-old Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital is an important historic landmark that must be preserved, according to state Senate President Richard Codey (D-Essex), who hopes to form a task force to consider how to save the massive, abandoned structure in Parsippany.

Codey will introduce a resolution next week when the Senate reconvenes to establish a panel to include historians, mental health advocates, architects, local, county and state officials, plus former Greystone patients and/or family members.

Codey's decision gives a huge

boost to a fledgling grassroots Morris County effort to save the hospital and surrounding acreage. Preserve Greystone, a non-profit group, is working to educate the public about Greystone and generate viable options for the future of the nearly half-million-square-foot structure that dates to 1876, plus some 130 surrounding acres.

"Greystone has a complex history, one that should be preserved as both a celebration of how far we've come and a stark reminder of the indignities that individuals with mental illness suffered at one time," said Codey, a longtime Greystone watchdog and mental-health advocate. "Without question,

Greystone is a melting pot of cultural, social and architectural history."

Codey wants the task force to provide a "thoughtful analysis" of how to preserve the history and architectural integrity of the old hospital while taking into account the state's fiscal constraints. He also wants the task force to incorporate an educational component into any preservation effort.

Designed a few years after the Civil War by Philadelphia architect Samuel Sloan, Greystone is a French Renaissance/Second Empire-style building, featuring marble pillars, beautiful interior staircases and a striking reception area. Upon

completion, the building was christened in 1876 by President Ulysses S. Grant.

When a new state-of-the-art Greystone opened in Parsippany last year, the old Greystone was abandoned and mothballed. It was turned over to the state treasury department, which hired a real estate consultant to assess its future. That worried local residents and preservationists, who were excited to learn about Codey's interest.

"This is fantastic," said Maureen Murray, a spokeswoman for Preserve Greystone. "We had talked about trying to get him involved. This makes for a really happy new year."