

200 Club of Essex County Annual Valor Awards Luncheon

Newark — The 200 Club of Essex County, founded to assist the families of police officers and firefighters killed in the line of duty and the oldest such organization of its kind, will hold its 2008 Valor Awards luncheon on Thursday, May 7th at Mayfair Farms in West Orange at 11:30 a.m.

Established in 1966, The 200 Club of Essex County has raised nearly \$2 million to support the spouses of fallen officers and to fund scholarships for their children through membership dues and the annual luncheon.

The 200 Club of Essex County, comprised of regional business and civic leaders, has spawned 18 similar charitable organizations throughout New Jersey. Arthur S. Guida, director of external affairs for PSE&G and The 200 Club president said, "This special organization is dedicated to the principle of caring for those who care for us.

Each year, our support from business and community leaders has dramatically increased."

"The job of a police officer or firefighter is tougher today than ever before," stated Essex County Sheriff Armando Fontoura, a member of The 200 Club's board of trustees. "Law enforcement and firefighting are extremely hazardous professions which are performed at tremendous personal risk. The work of The 200 Club of Essex County is greatly appreciated by the entire public safety community and their families."

According to Guida, eight local law enforcement officers, a sheriff's officer, a state police trooper and eight local firefighters will be recognized for bravery, dedication to duty, courageous vigilance and selflessness during the upcoming Valor Awards luncheon which will feature Newark Mayor Cory Booker as principal speaker. Under Mayor Booker's stewardship the crime rate for Newark has decreased in almost every category, including shootings and murder.

The 200 Club of Essex County will also remember the lives of New Jersey State Police Detective Sergeant 1st Class Dwayne Kelley, a resident of South Orange, who was killed while serving with the United States Army Reserves in Iraq and Belleville Police Officer Kenneth Santucci and all public safety officers who were killed in the line of duty last year.

Nominations for The 200 Club's Valor Award are made by chiefs of Essex County's municipal fire and law enforcement agencies and the commanding officers of federal, state and regional public safety departments. Valor Award recipients are selected by The 200 Club's Executive Committee.

Among this year's Valor Award honorees are Irvington Police Detective Roman Melenka who risked his life and was wounded when he thwarted an armed robbery at a tobacco and stationary store;

Newark Police Sgt. Anthony Venacio and Police Officers Carlos Alvarado, Emanuel Pereira and Juan Ramos for apprehending an armed suspect who was threatening the officers with a machine gun;

Verona Police Sgt. Michael Ruglio and Police Officers Joel Martin and Steven Young for rescuing a woman from her distraught and armed husband who was threatening to kill her and the officers with carving knives;

Essex County Sheriff's Detective Christopher Imperiale and New Jersey State Police Trooper Michael Leonardi who pursued and captured two armed robbery suspects;

Maplewood Firefighter/EMT Christopher Ariemma who rescued an elderly woman from a residential fire;

Newark Fire Captain Ernest Hammer and Firefighters Nelson Guzman and Edwin Irizarry and Irvington Fire Lieutenants Michael Giordano and Michael Ingram and Firefighters Paul Scurko and Scott Streeter who rescued 8 adults and a baby boy from a multi-story residential fire.

A special Commendation and a stipend of \$500 will also be presented to the Cedar Grove, Montclair, North Caldwell, Roseland and West Orange Fire Departments. On June 22, 2008, approximately four dozen members of these public safety agencies responded in their capacity as the West Essex Technical Rescue Team to save the life of a contractor who had fallen into a trench and was chest-deep in mud and other debris while attempting to install a sewer line. The trench was 15 feet below street

level. Despite temperatures in excess of 100 degrees and the threat of severe thunderstorms and dangerous lightning, the Rescue Team worked for hours before successfully freeing the victim.

