New High Tech Emergency Operations Center Opens

West Orange – Sheriff Armando Fontoura, Essex County emergency management coordinator, and County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. today welcomed local officials, members of the Essex County Chiefs of Police Association and municipal emergency management coordinators to the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the county’s new, state-of-the-art Emergency Operations Center (EOC), strategically located in the heart of Essex County at Codey Arena.
Using yellow police crime scene tape, Sheriff Fontoura and County Executive DiVincenzo cut the ribbon for the facility while praising United States Representative Rodney P. Frelinghuysen who steered millions of dollars in federal grant funding to Essex County for the project. Congressman Frelinghuysen was unavailable to attend today’s event due to business before the House of Representatives

The EOC will coordinate Essex County’s public safety response to large-scale disasters, acts of terrorism and major public events. The 5,300 square-foot facility is an environmentally efficient, self-sufficient command post and communications center. Access to the EOC will be controlled.

“There is no greater duty than to protect our residents and visitors by making sure that all public safety officers and their private sector counterparts are ready to respond to and recover from any natural or manmade emergency or disaster,” County Executive
Joseph DiVincenzo stated. “Essex County government is proud to be a leader in proactive, modern and innovative emergency management and homeland security initiatives.”

The Essex County EOC houses hundreds of miles of electrical wire and it features a vast array of interoperable communications systems, integrated computer systems, primary, back-up and satellite telephone systems, fully integrated audio and video display systems, 15 television screens with video surveillance capabilities, Smart Boards, external communications links to all local, regional, state and federal public safety agencies and emergency power generators. The complex also provides emergency personnel with showers, a kitchen, medical supplies and other living amenities.

“Essex County is a target-rich location for terrorists and the memory of the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon are not soon forgotten,” Sheriff Armando Fontoura noted. “Additionally, we are confronted annually by blizzards, ice storms, nor’easters, power outages, floods and the occasion airplane crash. Our extensive emergency management and homeland security training has prepared our First Responders with the skills needed to respond to any emergency and our new EOC will provide us with a home base to coordinate all response operations.”

The EOC will be the hub of all emergency management and homeland security drills, exercises and operations. The facility can be used as an alternate seat of county government if a disaster impacted the Essex County court complex. Additionally, the EOC will be made available for the special needs of municipal police departments and regional, state and federal law enforcement task forces.

“If disaster strikes, it is important that law and order be preserved and government
services maintained,” said County Executive DiVincenzo. “Our EOC is structured so that the functions of management, finance, administration, logistics and operations continue unimpeded.”

At today’s event, Rep. Frelinghuysen was cited for his public safety leadership and hard work.

“We had a vital need. We had solid plans to fill the need. What we didn’t have was the money,” DiVincenzo and Fontoura said in a joint statement. “Representative Frelinghuysen listened to us. He fully understood the dynamics of the situation we faced. He worked tirelessly and provided Essex County with the federal grant funding that made our high-tech EOC a reality. If it were not for him we would not be here today.”

Sheriff Fontoura added that the Essex County Offices of Emergency Management and Homeland Security which fall under his jurisdiction have standardized their approach to preparedness, incident management and response.

“We have the best and brightest people able to mitigate any disaster and maximize recovery capabilities,” Sheriff Fontoura pointed out. “Now, we have a modern, technical support facility with the flexibility to handle various emergency incidents in an effective and cost-efficient manner.”

At today’s EOC opening, the Essex County Office of Emergency Management also displayed an armada of specialized public safety equipment, including a mobile command post, bomb containment vehicles, generator trailers, portable lighting trucks, road barricade trailers, Community Emergency Response Team equipment, electronic message boards, a Rapid Deployment Team bus, a Tactical Response Team truck, a patrol and recovery boat, and communications and off-road vehicles.