

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 8, 2011

**ESSEX COUNTY EXECUTIVE DIVINCENZO
AND BRANCH BROOK PARK ALLIANCE ANNOUNCE LIONS SCULPTURES
IN ESSEX COUNTY BRANCH BROOK TO BE RESTORED*****Historic Sculptures to be Removed from Park on Tuesday, February 8
and Returned in Summer 2011***

Newark, NJ – Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. and the Branch Brook Park Alliance announced that the two limestone Lions sculptures located on the Music Court in Essex County Branch Brook Park near Park Avenue will be removed on Tuesday, February 8th. The two statues, which have been part of the Park's landscape since 1959, will be cleaned and historically restored as part of a multi-phase revitalization of the Music Court and Balustrade area at the lake front. They are anticipated to be returned to the site in the summer of 2011.

"The Lions are beloved landmarks that have contributed greatly to the aesthetics and historic appeal of Essex County Branch Brook Park. They are one of the many distinct features that make the Park such a unique and beautiful place for our residents," DiVincenzo said. "As part of our continuing efforts to revitalize our parks, the limestone statues are being removed from their locations so they can be repaired and restored so that a beautiful element of our past can be preserved for future generations," he added.

The Executive pointed out that the restoration of the Lions is the latest improvement in Branch Brook Park on which Essex County is partnering with the Branch Brook Park Alliance. "Once again, we are pleased to be partnering with the Branch Brook Park Alliance on a project that will restore the natural beauty and historic elements of the Park. Their help to transform Branch Brook has been invaluable," DiVincenzo said.

"Reviving Branch Brook Park for the people of this city and beyond is a labor of love that we share with the County Executive and we are pleased to see this next project get started," Branch Brook Park Alliance Co-Chair Barbara Bell Coleman said. "Donated by Prudential in 1959, these Lions represent the majesty of the Park's past and herald what it will become. They are an important link to Essex County's history and a treasure that has been enjoyed by generations. The work being done here will ensure they survive," she added.

The two Lions sculptures were created by Karl Bitter around 1904 and were originally located at the entrance to the Prudential Building at the corner of Broad Street and Bank Street in Newark. Prudential donated the sculptures to Essex County in 1959 and they have been located in the Music Court at the edge of the Balustrade that was developed in 1906. Over the years, exposure to

the elements, graffiti and damage caused by people who climb on them caused the Lions to begin to deteriorate.

After being removed from their bases on Wednesday, January 26th, the Lions will be transported to the Philadelphia studio of sculptor Pavel Efremoff, where they will undergo a restoration process conducted by Scott Kreilick of Kreilick Conservation. Graffiti, plant growth, paint and old patches will be cleaned from sculptures. Using historic photographs, missing details of the Lions will be recreated. For example, a new tail for one of the Lions will be carved from stone to match the historic limestone. When the restoration is complete, the sculptures will be treated with chemicals to retard further deterioration. The Lions will be placed on new stone pedestals when they are returned to the park in the summer of 2011.

The restoration of the Lions sculptures is part of a larger project to revitalize the entire area near Branch Brook Park Lake, which includes the Music Court and Balustrade (the ornamental stone railing along the water's edge).

Rhodeside & Harwell, a landscape architectural firm from Newark, received a contract from the Branch Brook Park Alliance to help coordinate the restoration and to design the improvements. Working with Rhodeside & Harwell is the CTS Group as consulting architects and Conservation Consulting LLC as consulting conservators. The restoration of the Lions sculptures is part of a \$372,220 publicly-bid contract awarded to Beaver Electric to perform the construction work on the Balustrade and Lions. The improvements are being funded with grants from the New Jersey Green Acres program and the Essex County Recreation and Open Space Trust Fund.

Revitalizing Essex County's Branch Brook Park

The renovation of the historic Octagon Fieldhouse in the Essex County Stephen N. Aduato, Sr. Sports Complex is currently underway. Completed in 2010 were a \$926,000 project to pave the park roadway, upgrade walking paths, and install historic lighting in the section of the park from the Cherry Blossom Welcome Center to Heller Parkway, the planting of 600 Cherry Trees and other trees throughout Branch Brook Park as part of a \$416,889 upgrade and the paving of the park roadway from Mill Street to Washington Street as part of a \$680,000 project.

In September 2009, the Middle Division Recreation Complex was renamed as the "Essex County Stephen N. Aduato, Sr. Sports Complex," in honor of the founder of The North Ward Center and Robert Treat Academy. In August 2009, a synthetic surface football/soccer field was constructed for \$917,662 and named after NFL Hall of Famer and Barringer High School alumni Andre Tippett. Earlier in 2009, a \$2.46 million facelift in the Branch Brook Park Extension was completed. This "demonstration project" enhanced landscaping, added Cherry Trees, improved pathways and modernized entranceways into the park from Franklin Avenue. In addition, a \$3 million project to rehabilitate the Bloomfield Avenue Bridge that passes over the Middle Division was finished in April 2009.

An \$840,000 renovation of the Cherry Blossom Welcome Center was finished in April 2008 and the building was transformed into a year-round showplace to raise awareness about the Japanese Flowering Cherry Blossom Trees. A replica of the historic Octagon Shelter in the Southern Division of Essex County Branch Brook Park was built for \$353,510 and opened in November 2007 and \$1.5 million was invested to modernize and reconfigure the baseball field complex known as the "three diamonds" in October 2007. The baseball/softball complex in the Branch Brook Park Middle Division was reopened in April 2005 after an \$11 million remediation and modernization project, and the historic restoration of the Park Avenue Bridge was completed in 2005. Entrance enhancements, new fencing and landscaping along Clifton Avenue and Mill Street, and a major improvement project along Lake Street have made the park more inviting.

Through an extraordinary public/private partnership, the Branch Brook Park Alliance and the Essex County Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs work collaboratively to restore and help program the Park for the enjoyment of thousands of children and families who utilize it each year.

The Essex County Park System was created in 1895 and is the first county park system established in the United States. The Park System consists of more than 6,000 acres and has 20 parks, five reservations, an environmental center, a zoo, ice skating rink, roller skating rink, three public golf courses, golf driving range, three off-leash dog facilities, a castle and the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens. Branch Brook Park was created in 1895 and is the first park in Essex County's system. At 359.72 acres, it is the largest county park in Essex.