

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 16, 2012

ESSEX COUNTY EXECUTIVE DIVINCENZO AND BRANCH BROOK PARK ALLIANCE ANNOUNCE \$4 MILLION FACELIFT IN ESSEX COUNTY BRANCH BROOK PARK SOUTHERN DIVISION IS COMPLETED

***Historic Prudential Lion Statues Named for Art and Pat Ryan
Concert Grove Dedicated to Prudential Financial
Memorial Cherry Tree Grove Rededicated to Kiyofumi Sakaguchi***



Newark, NJ – Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. and the Branch Brook Park Alliance announced on Monday, April 16th the completion of a \$4 million, multi-phase project to revitalize the lakefront area in Essex County Branch Brook Park's Southern Division. During the afternoon celebration, which featured musical selections by the NJ Symphony Orchestra, the two historic Prudential Lions Statues were dedicated to retired Prudential Chairman and CEO Arthur Ryan and his wife Pat, Co-Chair of the Branch Brook Park Alliance, for their dedication to restoring the Park, the music court overlooking the lake was dedicated as the "Prudential Concert Grove" to recognize the corporation's ongoing support to restore the Park, and a memorial cherry tree grove was rededicated in honor of Kiyofumi Sakaguchi, who was President and CEO of Prudential International Insurance at the time of his death.

"The Southern Division of Branch Brook Park has been reborn with the expansive improvements that have been completed here. This much-needed facelift revitalizes the Southern Division – which is the original section of the Park, returns the focus onto the concert grove, and creates beautiful vistas and scenic walkways for the public to enjoy," DiVincenzo said. "This was an extraordinary project that was completed through a unique public-private-non-profit partnership. The Branch Brook Park Alliance and Prudential Financial have been dedicated partners in our ongoing initiative to restore Branch Brook Park. Without their assistance, none of this would have been possible," he noted.

The County Executive also pointed out that the special recognitions being made were well-deserved. "Art and Pat Ryan, Prudential and Kiyofumi Sakaguchi each believed Essex County Branch Brook Park was a special place. They dedicated themselves to helping us achieve our goal, engaged others to assist us and raised awareness to the world of the natural treasures found right here in Essex County," the Executive said. "There is no higher honor that the County can give to thank them than naming these elements in the park for them," he added.

"It is always a pleasure to stand in support as we continue to make improvements to our Essex County parks and these improvements we are announcing today are the results of another beneficial public and private partnership," said Freeholder President Blonnie R. Watson. "I want to thank the County Executive for always valuing open space. The Board of Chosen

Freeholders will always be a partner for Essex County and the Branch Brook Park Alliance," she added.

"Although many, many people have been involved in what has truly been a labor of love, Prudential has played a special role from the beginning, and today we salute them on behalf of the one million people who use the park every year," said Barbara Bell Coleman, Co-Chair of the Branch Brook Park Alliance.

Rutgers Distinguished Service Professor and Branch Brook Park Alliance Trustee Dr. Clement Price served as Master of Ceremonies. Renowned Olmsted scholar Charles Beveridge spoke about Branch Brook Park's restoration as an outstanding example of the Olmsted park revival that has been occurring throughout the United States since the 1980s.

"We are very proud of this occasion and delighted to be here today. These improvements to Essex County's Branch Brook Park represent another example of Prudential's long standing commitment to corporate citizenship," said Prudential CEO and Chairman John Strangfeld.

"We are thankful to Essex County, the Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Branch Brook Park Alliance for this honor today because we have always been proud to partner with the County to make improvements throughout the Essex County Park System," said Art Ryan.

The four phases were as follows: 1. Historic Lions and Balustrade restoration; 2. Renovation of two park buildings – the Music Court Pavilions – for public use; 3. Restoration of the music court area; and 4. Restoration of the "Kiyofumi Sakaguchi Memorial Grove."

The **first phase** to restore the historic Prudential Lions and Balustrade began in January 2011 with the removal of the two limestone Lion statues. The 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 at the edge of the Balustrade that was developed in 1906. They recently were named for retired Prudential Board Chairman Art Ryan and his wife Pat, who is Co-Chair of the Branch Brook Park Alliance, in recognition of their commitment to Branch Brook Park.

Over the years, exposure to the elements, graffiti and wear and tear by children climbing on them caused the Lions to deteriorate. The Lions were brought to the Philadelphia studio of sculptor Pavel Efremoff, where they were restored by Scott Kreilick of Kreilick Conservation. Graffiti, plant growth, paint and old patches were cleaned and missing details of the Lions were restored. In order to preserve the original Lions, the statues were placed on the front steps to the Essex County Hall of Records in November 2011. Replica statues were created and were placed in Branch Brook Park in November 2011. County Executive DiVincenzo commented, "The replicas are made of cast stone and will allow the lions to be played on and loved by new generations of children, and will be better able to withstand these displays of affection that were eroding the original limestone lions." In addition, the Balustrade (the ornamental stone railing along the water's edge) was restored and missing sections were replaced.

The restoration was overseen by Rhodeside & Harwell, the CTS Group was the consulting architect and Conservation Consulting LLC was the consulting conservator. Beaver Electric received a \$372,220 publicly-bid contract to perform the construction work.

The **second phase** involved the rehabilitation of two historic buildings – the Music Court Pavilions – located near the lakefront. One of the buildings was transformed into a restroom building and the second was renovated as a public space for meetings and programs. Both buildings are equipped with historic trellises, stone pavers, ornamental lighting and benches, and upgrades were made to the landscaping. Paragon Restoration from Kenilworth, NJ, was awarded a \$752,790 contract to perform the construction work.

The **third phase** involved replacing the asphalt-covered Music Court with ornamental brick, stone and flagstone pavers, historic lighting, drainage and enhanced landscaping based on historic planting plans. Horticulturist and photographer Rick Darke also advised on native plantings for seasonal diversity. Let It Grow from River Edge, NJ, was awarded a competitively bid contract for \$797,895 to perform the construction work.

The architect for each of the first three phases was Rhodeside & Harwell, a landscape architectural firm from Newark and Alexandria, Va., that received a contract from the Branch Brook Park Alliance. Funding for the first three phases was provided by the Branch Brook Park Alliance, the NJ Green Acres program, the Essex County Recreation and Open Space Trust Fund, and the Essex County Capital Budget.

The **fourth phase** involved the rehabilitation of the Kiyofumi Sakaguchi Memorial Grove, a grove of Cherry Blossom trees named in 2002 in honor of Prudential's late chairman in Japan. The grove is located in Branch Brook Park's Southern Division along the lake. The phase of the project included installing new pathways, historic lighting, enhanced landscaping and improved drainage. Rhodeside and Harwell received a contract from the Branch Brook Park Alliance to design the improvements. Zenith Construction of Orange was awarded a competitively bid contract for \$1,139,000 to perform the construction work. Prudential donated \$1 million to fund this phase of the project. To recognize Prudential's ongoing support of the park's restoration over the past decade, the area was renamed as the "Essex County Prudential Concert Grove" and signs recognizing Mr. Sakaguchi were installed.

Revitalizing Essex County's Branch Brook Park

The dedication of a bronze statue honoring pioneering tennis legend Althea Gibson and the reconstruction of the 20-court tennis complex named in her honor were completed in March 2012. The improvements were about \$1 million. The two-mile park oval in the Northern Division was repaved at a cost of \$360,000 in April 2012.

The renovation of the historic Octagon Fieldhouse in the Essex County Stephen N. Aduato, Sr. Sports Complex cost \$423,900 and was completed in April 2011. 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, two miniature golf courses, Treetop Adventure Course, 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.