



Hon. Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.
Essex County Executive and
the Board of Chosen Freeholders



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**BRANCH BROOK PARK ALLIANCE CREATES OPPORTUNITY
FOR NEWARK STUDENTS TO GAIN VALUABLE “GREEN” JOB SKILLS
IN ESSEX COUNTY BRANCH BROOK PARK**
*Select Group Uses State-of-the-Art Technology to Inventory and Map
Recently Expanded Cherry Blossom Collection*

(Aug. 4, 2010: Newark, NJ) College and high school students have had a difficult time this summer finding work as the region’s economy slowly inches towards recovery. It’s been hard enough for young people to find jobs that pay, much less jobs that provide intellectually stimulating challenges and professional experience that will benefit them later in their career paths.

A group of two Rutgers biology students and eight talented students from Barringer High School and St. Benedict’s High School in Newark are among the lucky few whose experience has been quite the opposite. They are working hard every day outside in the beautiful environs of Essex County Branch Brook Park, where they are expanding their knowledge of botany, geography, geometry and even astronomy as part of Branch Brook Park Alliance’s initiative to create a comprehensive mapping and tracking system of the park’s famous cherry blossom tree collection.

“Over the last several years, we have dedicated a great deal of resources to plant thousands of new Cherry Blossoms in Essex County Branch Brook Park. Expanding the number of trees has preserved this beautiful natural treasure that fills the park with color every spring. Mapping the trees will help us monitor the health of our trees so that we can avoid a crisis,” DiVincenzo said. “Organizing this project is another example of the Branch Brook Park Alliance’s stewardship and commitment to the Park. We appreciate the hard work of the students, who are making a significant contribution and gaining a greater appreciation for our Park,” he added.

Students like Paul Oyefesobi, a 2010 graduate of St. Benedict’s, who is attending Lehigh University in the fall, have been working for four weeks on the project, which is being funded by a \$40,000 City of Newark Community Development Block Grant. They were chosen by the Branch Brook Park Alliance (BBPA) based upon interviews and recommendations from faculty members at their respective schools.

“These kids come to work each day with inexhaustible energy plus a real enthusiasm for learning. When you ask them what they’re enjoying about their work, invariably they mention feeling good about the work being truly valuable,” said Jim Lecky, Executive Director of the BBPA. “They have made a significant and valuable contribution to our ongoing efforts to create a modern, efficient and effective maintenance plan for the park so that its beauty can be enjoyed by residents and visitors for years to come.”

Using sophisticated GPS tracking equipment and software, the students divide into teams to tag and assess the condition of each individual cherry tree, and to identify the coordinates of each tree using high tech satellite tracking systems. Details about the location and condition of each tree are fed into a main database to create a “landscape inventory,” enabling increased efficiency and targeted care in the maintenance of this valued collection.

Essex County Branch Brook Park is home to the country’s largest collection of cherry blossom trees in one location. The original collection was a living legacy of Mrs. Caroline Bamberger Fuld, who intended that her gift of 2,000 trees in 1928 would make the collection in Branch Brook Park rival that of the national display in Washington, DC’s Tidal Basin.

After several decades without an ongoing maintenance and replacement program, the cherries dwindled to fewer than 1,000 trees by 2004, when the BBPA, a not-for-profit organization, who along with Essex County is committed to restoring and revitalizing the park, conducted the first comprehensive tree inventory in the park’s 110 year history. County Executive DiVincenzo, BBPA and Prudential joined together to conduct a massive fundraising and replanting effort to renovate the cherry blossom collection. This comprehensive mapping and assessment project is a vital part of that effort.

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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.

For more information on Branch Brook Park Alliance, please visit:
www.branchbrookpark.org or call 973/268.2300