

Essex County Cherry Blossom Kick Off Press Conference

ESSEX COUNTY EXECUTIVE DIVINCENZO ANNOUNCES PLANS

FOR 48th ANNUAL ESSEX COUNTY CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

Newark, NJ – Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. outlined the schedule of events for the 48th annual Essex County Cherry Blossom Festival on Tuesday, March 12th. The festival, which will be held from Saturday, April 6th to Sunday, April 14th, highlights the blooming season of the 5,300 Cherry Blossom trees.

“The natural beauty of the cherry blossoms has been attracting visitors to the park since they were first planted there in the late 1920s. The festival has helped unify the community, highlighted the benefits of Branch Brook Park and the local neighborhood, and enabled the public to enjoy the blooming trees in a variety of ways,” DiVincenzo said. “We invite the public to come out and enjoy our display of 5,300 trees, which is larger than the national display in Washington, DC, and the most diverse collection in the world,” he added.

“We have an exciting line-up of activities where visitors can admire the beauty of the trees, learn about the history of our Parks System and engage in Japanese cultural demonstrations. The blossoming trees create a pink and white canopy that is perfect for picnics, photographs and simple enjoyment,” the Executive said.

“This park and the Cherry Blossoms have been the backdrop for so many different memories for our families. But the festival also highlights the importance of preserving open spaces and promoting environmental justice. This is an investment in the future,” NJ Senate Majority Leader and Deputy Chief of Staff Teresa Ruiz said.

“This is a wonderful event with a long tradition that is greatly enjoyed by the community,” Commissioner President Carlos Pomares said. “The new community center is a wonderful addition that will certainly become an integral part of the festival. It’s always nice to see the trees in bloom to welcome the warmer weather,” Commissioner Vice President Tyshammie Cooper said. “For many of us, seeing the Cherry Blossoms in bloom signals the beginning of spring,” Commissioner Len Luciano said.

“I commend Joe DiVincenzo for spearheading the revitalization of Branch Brook Park and the Cherry Blossoms. The festival provides unique opportunities to enjoy the beauty of the park and is one of the most spectacular events that highlights the county and city,” Newark North Ward Councilman Anibal Ramos said.

Belleville Mayor Michael Melham said the festival events strengthen the bonds in the community and promote the local economy. Melham regularly participates in the Cherry Blossom 10K Run and is looking forward to run in the event this year.

“This is a magnificent location that is known throughout Essex County, New Jersey and the nation. I am always astonished by how beautiful it is in the park every spring,” Sheriff Armando Fontoura said.

Branch Brook Park Alliance President Thomas Dougherty described the Cherry Blossoms and the festival as “an opportunity to celebrate life and promote economic development.”

“For residents near the park, we have the pleasure to see the park from our windows during all four seasons. Spring is special because of the trees being in bloom,” said Forest Hills Community Association President Jackie Jay, who encouraged everyone to help promote the festival by bringing one new person to experience the park.

The **48th Annual Essex County Cherry Blossom Festival** includes the following events:

Cherry Blossom Challenge Annual Bike Race

Race through Branch Brook Park in the Cherry Blossom Challenge, a competitive New Jersey tradition, or cheer on the cyclists while enjoying a day in the fresh, spring air. Various races occur throughout the morning, with the first race at 7 a.m. and the last race at 12 Noon. **Registration fees apply to racers.** It's free to enter the park and watch. The *Cherry Blossom Challenge Bike Race* will be held as follows:

Date: **Saturday, April 6, 2024**

Time: **7 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

Place: **Essex County Branch Brook Park**

Heller Parkway

Newark, NJ

Cherry Blossom 10K Run

The Cherry Blossoms provide a beautiful canopy for runners as they make their way through Branch Brook Park. A portion of the race proceeds benefit the Special Olympics. Online registration can be done at www.compuscore.com. Same day registration begins at 8 a.m. Advanced registration is recommended. Race starts at 10 a.m. It's free to enter the park and watch. The *Cherry Blossom 10K Run* will be held as follows:

Date: **Sunday, April 7, 2024**

Time: **Registration: 8 a.m.**

10K Race: 10 a.m.

Disabled Start: 10:10 a.m.

Place: **Essex County Branch Brook Park**

Cherry Blossom Welcome Center

Newark, NJ

1-Mile Fun Run and Walk

Celebrate the arrival of spring and get fit with your family or friends. Children are encouraged to run individually or as a member of a school team. Schools and groups must register in advance by contacting Jacquelyn Matthews at jmatthews@parks.essexcountynj.org. **This is a free event.** All participants will receive a commemorative T-shirt while supplies last. The *Fun Run and Walk* will be held as follows:

Date: Saturday, April 13, 2024

Time: 9 a.m. Registration
10 a.m. Race

Place: Essex County Branch Brook Park
Southern Division, Prudential Concert Grove
Newark, NJ

Essex County Family Day

The public is encouraged to come out and enjoy an afternoon of family fun with a variety of events including live performances, children's activities and more. Bring your own picnic lunch or purchase food from vendors who will be on site and enjoy the picturesque views overlooking the lake. **Admission is free but food and other merchandise will be for sale.** The *Family Day* will be held as follows:

Date: Saturday, April 13, 2024

Time: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Place: Essex County Branch Brook Park
Southern Division, Prudential Concert Grove
Newark, NJ

Bloomfest

Enjoy a family day in the pink park! A packed schedule of events includes cultural demonstrations, children's activities, live music, a crafter's marketplace, food and more at the Cherry Blossom Welcome Center. Additional musical performances will be held at the Prudential Concert Grove in the Southern Division of the park. **Admission is free; food and merchandise will be for sale.** *Bloomfest* will be as follows:

Date: Sunday, April 14, 2024

Times: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Place: Essex County Branch Brook Park

Main Area: Northern Division, Oval
Heller Parkway, Newark, NJ

Second Stage: Southern Division, Prudential Concert Grove
Newark, NJ

Cherry Blossom Talks

These 30-minutes talks will include information about the history of Cherry Blossom trees in the United States, the types of trees that have been used, how the trees have been incorporated into the landscape and some exploration behind their meaning. No reservations are needed. The *Cherry Blossom Talks* will be held as follows:

Dates: Thursdays, April 4, 11, 18 & 25, 2024
Saturdays, April 6, 13, 20 & 27, 2024

Times: 11 a.m.

Place: Essex County Branch Brook Park
Cherry Blossom Welcome Center
Newark, NJ

Historic Tours by Cell Phone

This free, self-guided historic walking tour can be accessed by cell phone or smart phone all season long. Spend the day exploring all 72 tour stops or pick and choose your favorites. One call to 973-433-9047 or a scan of the bar code at each tour stop unlocks a world of park history and horticultural information. The tour is now available in Spanish.

History, driving directions, a complete list of activities and a web cam where the public can monitor the cherry trees for the peak of the bloom season can be accessed by visiting www.essexcountynj.org/branch-brook-park.

The Essex County Cherry Blossom Festival is hosted by the Essex County Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs.

Cherry Tree Planting Campaign

The general public and business community can participate in a fundraising campaign to purchase and plant Cherry Trees in Essex County Branch Brook Park. Each new Cherry Tree can be purchased for \$225 from the Essex County Parks Foundation, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Contributions to the foundation are tax-deductible, checks can be made out to "Essex County Parks Foundation" and mailed to the **Essex County Parks Foundation, 115 Clifton Avenue, Newark, NJ 07104**. Please write "*Cherry Blossom Campaign*" on the memo line of the check.

Donations are being recognized in a "Cherry Blossom Giving Tree" located at the entrance of the Essex County Cherry Blossom Welcome Center. Donations of \$225 are recognized with a leaf on the Giving Tree and donations of \$1,000 or more are recognized with special plaques on the Giving Tree wall. Donors can choose to have their name inscribed on the Giving Tree or make the contribution in memory of a loved one.

Many of the original Cherry Trees planted in Branch Brook Park were donated to the Essex County Park System by the Bamberger and Mrs. Felix Fuld family in 1927. At its height, there were about 2,500 Cherry Trees in Branch Brook Park. According to the Branch Brook Park Alliance, the original Cherry Trees began to die because of old age and, in 2006, it was determined the original collection had diminished significantly. County Executive DiVincenzo kicked off an aggressive planting program to strengthen and expand the number of cherry trees. To date, there are more than 5,000 cherry blossoms throughout Branch Brook Park.

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 23 parks, five reservations, an environmental center, a zoo, Treetop Adventure Course, ice skating rink, roller skating rink, three public golf courses, golf driving range, two miniature golf courses, five 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.