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Mercer County Prosecutor's Office Completes Firearms Training Facility Improvement Project

Acting Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri announced today the completion of a four-year improvement and expansion project at the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office Firearms Training Facility in Hopewell, NJ.

This state-of-the-art training center is used by Mercer County police agencies, including the police academy, to train and qualify with firearms under shared service agreements. State and federal law enforcement agencies also utilize the county facility.

"Law enforcement agencies today are faced with the need to meet unprecedented physical, moral and legal challenges when training officers who are required to deploy their firearms in the line of duty," Onofri said. "Firearms training for law enforcement demands more than mastering the fundamentals of marksmanship. It is a continuous process that begins in the police academy and continues throughout one's career."

Onofri expressed his thanks to Mercer County Executive Brian M. Hughes and the Board of Chosen Freeholders for their support of this important project. The four-phase renovation and expansion totaled approximately \$500,000 and was paid through a combination of general county budget funds and forfeiture funds from the prosecutor's office. Highlights of the improvements and upgrades include:

- **Exterior lights** installed for night shooting. A large number of police-involved shootings occur in low light, ambient light or no light. Stadium lighting was added to supplement low-light training.

- **A training center** with lockers, a classroom that seats 40 people, and offices for visiting instructors was built. The classroom is equipped with a “smart” television for interactive training where officers can complete instruction on topics like motor vehicle pursuit and use of force.
- **Laser shot room.** Laser shot is an interactive training system that simulates real-life scenarios and aides officers in judgmental use of force, also known as decision-making shooting. This system enables progressive training from realistic engagements to better prepare law enforcement for encounters where the use of deadly force may be used.
- **Ballistic wall.** The number of shooting lanes was expanded from 12 to 24. The site was separated into two distinct, 12-lane ranges that allows for multiple agencies to utilize the facility as well as the availability for an agency to run different training scenarios simultaneously. The right side of the range has automated or manually operated turning targets that turn toward and away from the shooter. This allows for targets to be exposed for specific time intervals, which are designed to build on judgmental shooting, shooting at moving targets and engaging multiple targets at one time. Turning targets also strictly hold officers to a time standard during training.
- **An observation tower** was constructed to enhance the instructor’s view during exercises because of the hazards inherent in firearms training. Law enforcement firearms training has evolved from shooting at static targets to a program that focuses on realistic live-fire training scenarios. Officers are now required to shoot on the move while engaging multiple moving targets, often during low-light conditions.
- **Live-fire shoot house.** The shoot house is constructed of steel, which allows officers to use live ammunition. Additionally, steel bullet trap target holders were also constructed that can be moved within the structure. Doors were added leading into the various rooms so that officers can train in techniques to enter rooms that have open and closed doors. Shoot house training includes both live-fire indoor training combined with simulation training systems, such as Simunitions, a paint marker-type bullet that allows officers to train with an armed adversary. The shoot house offers interactive judgmental and use-of-force training for law enforcement because officers today cannot simply rely on fixed firing lines and paper targets to deal with active shooter threats, ambush-style attacks and lone wolf-style terrorist attacks.

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Acting Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri (second from right) and Mercer County Executive Brian M. Hughes (fourth from right) were joined by law enforcement representatives and county officials to celebrate the completion of the firearms training facility.



A Mercer County Prosecutor's Office firearms instructor utilizes one of the range's shooting lanes.