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Emergency services site to be hardened

By Melissa Lane

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As Collier County's new Emergency Services Center steadily rises from the construction site and takes shape, community and state leaders are taking notice.

Located on 20 acres situated between Edison College and Lely Elementary School, on Lely Cultural Boulevard in East Naples, the center will share this location with the future South Regional Library.

When completed, the center will house numerous agencies including a new 9-1-1 dispatch center, an East Naples sheriff's substation, Emergency Medical Services administrative offices and supply warehouse, backup information and technology systems, offices for the Bureau of Emergency Services and the Emergency Management Department, and a new county Emergency Operations Center with provisions to manage and orchestrate the county's multi-faceted disaster response activities.

Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp visited the current EOC, Aug. 8, to see first-hand the existing facility and review the status of preparedness activities for this year's hurricane season. During his visit, Kottkamp noted the cramped quarters and low elevation of the current facility, emphasizing the state's continued support for the new 'hardened' facility under construction. The term 'hardened' refers to facilities that can withstand hurricane strength winds and other emergency conditions.

According to Kottkamp, having a facility designed to survive a storm is as important as equipping it with the latest tools and technology to provide for the community during and after a disaster.

"Bricks and mortar are nice, but it's the cutting edge equipment inside the building that counts," he said.

In 2006, House Bill 7121 provided a mixture of state and federal grant money to support new 'hardened' EOCs in the State of Florida. Collier County is scheduled to receive up to \$3.16 million toward the EOC portion of the new facility.

When completed in late 2008, the EOC will be resistant to a category 5 hurricane, withstanding winds greater than 155 mph and storm surge flooding of more than 22 feet. Additionally, it will have many backup systems that will ensure communication and power for many days after an event.

"This new center will house, in a secure and survivable location, all of the critical functions necessary to run the county after a disaster," said Bureau of Emergency Services Director Dan Summers. "When local government is able to continue to operate during and immediately after a disaster like a hurricane, recovery from that disaster happens a lot quicker."

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