

New Montgomery County Public Safety Academy Hailed as State of the Art

Academy is part of a \$101 million county facility that's a centerpiece of County Executive Ike Leggett's "Smart Growth Initiative"

BY ANDREW METCALF



A Montgomery County firefighter and another man walks into the grand opening ceremony of the new Montgomery County Public Safety Training Academy. All photos by Andrew Metcalf

County police and fire department recruits will soon occupy their new home.

On Friday, county officials celebrated the opening of the new Montgomery County Public Safety Training Academy in Montgomery Village. The complex is the major piece of the 40 acre, \$101 million service park that also includes a training facility for Ride On bus drivers, a food distribution center for the public school system and a maintenance facility for schools and the parks department.

It's also a central component of County Executive Ike Leggett's "Smart Growth Initiative," which he launched in 2008 as a way to sell valuable county land to developers while repurposing less valuable county properties to build new county facilities.

The completion of the academy on Snouffer School Road in Montgomery Village will allow the county to demolish its old public safety training facilities on Great Seneca Highway in Rockville and eventually sell the more than 50 acres of land to bring it back onto the tax rolls.



County officials including County Executive Ike Leggett and police Chief Tom Manger stand for the singing of the National Anthem at the ceremony.

"If you go back and look at the history of this administration, there are 49 facilities that we have built in the last 10 years," Leggett said, reflecting on his time as county executive. "Keep in mind that we did so in the midst of one of the greatest recessions in the history of this country... . We took advantage of that because we could build at cheaper cost because people needed the work. We could build cheaper because the money was cheaper to borrow. So I said in the midst of the recession this is the time we needed to build."

The training academy includes classroom space, a K9 training building, two firing ranges, vehicle training tracks, fire and rescue simulation buildings, a weight room, community room and a cafeteria.

"We've got a facility now that's going to allow us to do the training the way it's supposed to be done," Montgomery County police Chief Tom Manger said.



The ribbon is cut on the new building

One of the firing ranges enables officers to drive a vehicle inside the range, allowing them to jump out of their cars, run for cover and shoot at targets—scenario-based training that Manger described as extremely valuable.

There's also a "cityscape" training facility that allows officers to practice situations occurring at buildings that are modeled after a multistory home, a school, a bank and a convenience store. The K9 facility has an 80,000-square-foot training yard.



The new static firing range



The "cityscape" police training grounds include a single-family mock home (left) and a dual bank and convenience store (center)

The fire department has two buildings where firefighters can simulate fire responses and a large bay warehouse that can fit a fire truck. There's also a mock gas station and fuel tanker on site for practice purposes. New fire recruits will learn first aid and emergency medicine inside a room that will be outfitted with the back of an ambulance as well as inside two-tiered classrooms that are set up like a college lecture room.

"We now have some of the most realistic and safe fire and rescue simulations our staff can be exposed to," Fire Chief Scott Goldstein said.



The fire training structures.



The high-ceilinged fire training bay.

Neighbors who may fear smoke coming from the facility need not worry—due to the nearby Gaithersburg Airpark, there will be no training using fire at the academy because of the possibility smoke may interfere with flights as well as due to community concern. Those operations will be moved to an outdoor facility in Poolesville, according to officials.

Next month, the first recruits will enter the new facility. The fire and rescue department moves their training programs into the new academy Nov. 10 while police will begin using it Nov. 18.



The main building at the Public Safety Academy



One of two fire department training tiered classrooms



Weight room



The new K9 training facility



A view of a large portion of the 40-acre training campus from the a second floor fire department classroom.