

Fairgrounds hosts out-of-state recovery workers

By DAVID Danzis



FRANKFORD -- As a result of two nor'easters that hit the county on March 2 and 7, a staging area for responding utility crews from multiple states was set up at the Sussex County Fairgrounds and was still in place as of Saturday.

Crews from FirstEnergy Corp., the parent company of electricity provider Jersey Central Power & Light, came from various locations, including Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Additional crews from Michigan, Indiana, Florida, Kentucky, Alabama and Georgia, among others, are also at the site.

On Thursday, West Penn Power general manager Ray Yackovich said there were 469 workers signed in. Yackovich was guiding Gov. Phil Murphy; state Sen. Steven Oroho and Assemblymen Parker Space and Hal Wirths, all R-24th Dist.; and Byram Mayor Alex Rubenstein on a tour of the site.

Yackovich said the site serves to support the workers. The entire operation is self-contained: the crew members eat, sleep, shower and do laundry at the site.

FirstEnergy Corp. contracts with Storm Services LLC, a rapid response company based in Georgia that specializes in emergency disaster efforts, to provide lodging, meals and other accommodations for the out-of-state crew members.

There are 13 sleeper trailers on the site, each holding 36 people stacked three high and six deep on either side. There are two full-size shower units and one laundry unit, which has an additional 10 available showers.

The Shotwell Building at the fairgrounds is also housing 100 crew members on cots. Each day, after the crews leave, bags of clean linens are placed on the cots, replacing the ones used the night before.

The meal hall is the largest tent at the site. During the day, it's empty. But in the morning, before the crews go out, and at night when they return, it's the busiest location on site, Yackovich said. Every worker is provided three meals a day, which includes a bagged lunch to take on the road.

Yackovich said the "public outpouring of support" has been overwhelming, with local residents stopping by to drop off baked goods.

Sussex County Fairgrounds Manager Gary Larson said the site is being provided at no cost for the duration of the recovery efforts. The fairgrounds has also allowed FirstEnergy to use the administration building and conference center to provide on-site educational training for the out-of-state workers, who are all required to take a crash course about the surrounding area, protocols and safety requirements.

"The work that's coming out here is sincere and hard," Larson told the governor on Thursday. "It's really impressive what these guys do."

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