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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **SHERIFF'S OFFICE IN THE FOREFRONT AS AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH GETS UNDERWAY**

**Freehold:** Sheriff Shaun Golden is committed to having law enforcement remain in the forefront when it comes to autism awareness. He was pleased to welcome Fran Hines, an autism awareness trainer with the New Jersey Department of Health, and, a parent of an autistic child, to the Monmouth County Police Academy, on April 1, which marks the beginning of Autism Awareness Month. Hines held a training session for the 43 recruits from the 88<sup>th</sup> Basic Course for Police Officers on autism awareness.

"As we recognize April as Autism Awareness Month, it's important to note that the law enforcement community is dedicated to acknowledging this disorder throughout the year," said Sheriff Shaun Golden, a trustee of the Monmouth Ocean Foundation for Children. "Through attentive training, it's vital that law enforcement officers become equipped with information and understand the problems associated with autism to effectively assist an individual who needs help."

During the autism awareness class, Hines trained the recruits on how to prepare themselves when dealing with individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). He listed the signs an individual with ASD can display, such as being non-verbal, having no eye contact, exhibiting violent tendencies, fear, and nervousness. Because they behave differently it's important for members of law enforcement and the public safety community to be patient and understand the situation. In addition, they need to be aware of individuals who do not take direction or answer questions, and, know how to interact with them. *(con't)*

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“Law enforcement must have a deep understanding of how to approach a situation and know the risks when dealing with an individual with ASD,” said Fran Hines. “In addition, it crucial that parents contact their local police departments to make them aware their child has ASD.”

Hines has also trained the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office public safety telecommunicators how to prepare themselves when responding to calls involving individuals with ASD. The agency's public safety telecommunicators were the first group of 9-1-1 operators in the state to receive such training which began in 2011. It equips operators with information on autism to effectively assist a caller and prepare first responders on the emergency.

According to recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control, it's estimated that one in 68 children in multiple communities in the United States has been identified with ASD.

Furthermore, the report stated, in New Jersey, one in 45 children were identified with ASD.

"The increase of our autistic community has ultimately resulted in an increase of law enforcement and first responder contacts, and that begins with 9-1-1 operators who take the call. That is why it's vital they are equipped with the right information," said Hines.

Through the training course, operators are briefed on what questions need to be asked when dealing with an emergency situation regarding an individual with ASD. Those questions include if the individual is verbal or non-verbal, how he or she interacts with people, what, if any, unusual behaviors does the individual have, has the individual wandered off before, and, if so, where? Individuals with ASD often gravitate towards water, and, drowning is the leading cause of death among that population. Once that information is gathered by the operators, they will pass it to responding agencies on how best to approach the situation, as well as decide if additional first responders need to be dispatched. They can also inform parents about Project Lifesaver, an electronic monitoring program for individuals with ASD and Alzheimers. Project Lifesaver is a partnership between the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office and the Monmouth County Office on Aging. To date, there are 77 individuals with ASD who utilize the Project Lifesaver Program in Monmouth County.

*(con't)*

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"I'm proud of the commitment the sheriff's office has made and the lead our public safety telecommunicators and members of law enforcement have in autism awareness," said Sheriff Golden. "They need to be educated about this disorder and work together or they can be at a disadvantage when it comes to assisting individuals with ASD."

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