

Emergency Management to host open house & show off high tech equipment on Nov. 4

By Cheryl Skinner

The Fort Bend County Office of Emergency Management (EOC) is hosting an open house on November 4 to acquaint the public with the office and to show off the high technology that is now evident throughout the office.

The open house will be held between the hours of 1 and 5 P.M. for anyone wishing to see the many improvements made to the agency. The open house will allow interested individuals "to experience what was once an idea turned into reality," say county officials.

Over the last two years, County Judge Robert Hebert has worked to reorganize the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to better serve the citizens of Fort Bend County, officials say.

The EOC is the hub of all emergency communications for response and recovery operations during times of crisis, such as the recent Hurricane Rita threat. County officials say the ultimate goal of an EOC is to provide direction and control by continuously developing, exercising, and coordinating the county's Emergency Management Plan.

Under the direction of Emergency Management Coordinator Jeff Braun, the office looks much different from previous years. When Hebert and Braun first began working on an overall plan, the office housed mismatched desks and outdated technol-

ogy. Hebert says that over time, the OEM staff, working with other county departments, visited emergency management centers around the region to learn, explore, and visualize new ideas for Fort Bend County.

During these visits OEM staff determined Fort Bend's need to increase

preparedness and coordination among various agencies. With the help of Hebert, the agency was able to secure Federal Homeland Security grants. With these funds, Braun and his staff were able to turn what was once an idea, into reality, officials said.

"After our experience with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, I am so glad that I was able to contribute to this project. Our ideas went to great use. This facility is used year round in preparation for natural and/or man-made disasters and has been highly functional during hurricane season," Hebert noted.

Hebert says what used to be tables, chairs, and loose leaf paper, is now an efficient "state of the art operations center."

The facility is located at 307 Fort Street in Richmond. Refreshments will be available for those taking a tour of the facility.