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San Antonio's New Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Showcases Design-Build Strengths of Ross & Baruzzini

January 7, 2008 – When a public bond issue was passed in 2003 for a new, joint-use Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in San Antonio, the challenge was to create a state-of-the-art facility that was prepared to respond to catastrophic, all-hazard events while allowing for the seamless integration and operation of previously independent city, county, regional, state and federal emergency management personnel.

Officially opened on December 3, 2007, the new \$24.5 million, 36,000 square foot joint city and county EOC located at Brooks City-Base seems to have succeeded in meeting these goals and more. As noted by The Honorable Nelson W. Wolff, Judge, Bexar County at the opening ceremonies, "This facility will secure our ranking of second safest city in the U.S., and more than likely we will surpass that position to first."

As a secure command and control center, key features include a central command operations space for 15 emergency support functions with more than 100 participants, an emergency planning/policy room that can accommodate 25 participants and 32 support personnel, a media briefing room, administrative and support space, data center designed for future growth, redundant communications system and electrical backup generator system designed to accommodate a sustained activation. There also is space for regional medical operations support, including a Web EOC that provides current information on all available local and regional hospital beds.

For Ross & Baruzzini, the San Antonio EOC is a showcase of the firm's critical operations, design and engineering practices, entitled CODE. In addition to being responsible for developing the facility and technology programming, schematic design, design development, and subsequent RFP oversight, Ross & Baruzzini also maintained an on-going advisory role throughout the construction process.

At the beginning of the project, District Chief Nim Kidd, the City Emergency Management Coordinator, had a stated objective "to manage certain constraints to achieve our goals with the most efficient use of our limited financial resources." The City also required that everything fit together with a cohesive flow, including interrelationships and interdependences that would be tested in an emergency situation.

Ross & Baruzzini met the City's challenge and the EOC opened on time and under budget.

The results are impressive. An article in the *San Antonio Express News* states, "The spacious command room is built in three tiers, with small work pods that can be reconfigured to make larger stations if needed. Each station has at least three phones, laptop computers and a microphone to communicate with the entire room. The focal point of the room is three large screens where maps, hospital and emergency response statistics and other data can be

projected. On the video wall are four flat-panel displays, where local and cable news can be watched.”

Ross & Baruzzini’s extensive CODE experience was of critical importance to the success of the EOC project. Having designed operations and emergency centers for cities such as Detroit, Tulsa and St. Louis, as well as more than 18 airport communications, emergency and operations centers from Portland, Oregon to Miami, Florida, Ross & Baruzzini understood the inherent challenges for a project of this complexity.

“Because one of the guiding principles of Ross & Baruzzini is to help clients leverage their investment, we never push technology for technology’s sake,” said Theresa A. Smith, Senior Project Manager for Ross & Baruzzini. “Instead, we conducted a detailed analysis to determine where it was possible to be conservative in our design processes and where it was necessary to be aggressive with state-of-the-market solutions to accomplish strategic objectives stated by the stakeholders. And, we were extremely fortunate to be able to work with a client that was so engaged in the process.”

Merging the emergency management offices of the City of San Antonio and Bexar County into one shared facility also required a building design that made sense in terms of adjacencies, floor plans and functionality as well as site positioning, traffic patterns and landscaping elements. Ross & Baruzzini met this challenge by focusing on customizing solutions, which resulted at one point in reversing the floor plan to improve personnel and vehicular circulation.

According to Mike Shea, Principal Architect, who manages Ross & Baruzzini’s Critical Operations Design and Engineering CODE practice, there are always lessons to be learned from past projects. “For the San Antonio EOC, we were able to draw upon Ross & Baruzzini’s extensive experience developing critical operations centers for airports nationwide,” said Shea. “This not only helped us deal with some unique challenges, it enabled us to identify strategic opportunities based on local factors, including stakeholder composition, budget criteria, prevailing codes, site conditions and related threats and vulnerabilities.”

Both the City and the County were pleased with the result. Personnel are confident that the facility will support their efforts to efficiently gather, evaluate and distribute critical information and implement responsive actions during a terrorist incident, a flood or significant weather situation, a major hazardous materials accident or other natural or man-made emergencies or disasters.

In addition to serving as the lead architectural consultant, Ross & Baruzzini served as the mechanical, electrical, plumbing and fire protection (MEPFP) engineering and technology consultant for three integrative elements of an EOC: business process, facility and technology system design.

About Ross & Baruzzini

Ross & Baruzzini specializes in providing client solutions and consulting for facilities and infrastructure challenges in the healthcare, education, government, aviation and maritime industries. Ross & Baruzzini has been ranked as one of the top engineering and architectural firms in the United States by *Consulting-Specifying Engineer* magazine. Founded in 1953, the company is headquartered in St. Louis and has regional offices in Miami and Indianapolis. More information is available at www.rossbar.com.