

## TOPIC OF THE DAY Novins Planetarium

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### Use county funds to help save it

It is a great accomplishment for the Ocean County freeholders to do something local municipalities have not achieved: reduce a property tax rate. ("County tax rate reaches new low," Feb. 15.)

But while praise is due, they are being pennywise and pound foolish.

Don't blame the state cuts. Don't dwell on the fraud, regardless of why or who is to blame, while refusing to bail out the Novins Planetarium at Ocean County College in Toms River. ("Group wants to reopen star attraction," March 8.) It shows a lack of compassion and common sense.

The freeholders are able to make things right and preserve the planetarium, which is as necessary an asset to this county as any park or open space.

The freeholders are able to give us all back almost 3 cents on each \$100 of assessed property value but lack the vision to keep a penny to save the planetarium on the college campus. With county land values reaching \$103 billion, even one cent on the tax rate is an ample \$10 million revenue. Refurbishing the planetarium and keeping it open would cost the freeholders much less than that.

Ocean County College and Novins Planetarium serve the entire community. How is it logical to give us back pennies and sacrifice such a valuable asset? Conservatively, 30,000 county residents and schoolchildren use the facility each year. The state has 21 counties, but roughly 10 planetariums for the public. This planetarium is undeniably a unique ambassador for the college campus community.

As a child, I went on a class trip there. As an adult on campus, I passed the building each day, watching the line form as the next generation of children had that same opportunity.

A new director found ways to reach out and reinvigorate community interest. Whether they come for a class trip or for a pajama party, people need a chance to dream and expand their minds on an amazing dream journey of the universe —priceless and worth more than a penny investment.

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