

## Fundraising efforts to save OCC planetarium taking off

### Shutdown followed donor's failure to pay \$2.5M

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Efforts to raise money to reopen Ocean County College's Robert J. Novins Planetarium are gathering momentum with the college's Board of Trustees and the private nonprofit Save the Planetarium Fund holding separate fundraising campaigns.

The planetarium was shut down in early September after college officials decided it didn't make financial sense to continue making repairs to the 1970s-era auditorium after self-styled donor Edward Devine failed to deliver on a promise to pay \$2.5 million for an overhaul.

Save the Planetarium Fund's first fundraising event, the annual Astronomy Day at the OCC campus in April, was "incredibly successful, to the tune of \$3,300 in qualifying dollar-for-dollar matching gift donations and almost \$700 in donations" from sales of commemorative T-shirts and "Ursa Minor" teddy bears, fund president Richard Gamba wrote in a summary of that event's results.

A donor from the Toms River area has pledged to match donations up to \$500 from individuals and youth and school groups, and that can lend some real leverage to upcoming programs, Gamba said. Events include:

Wednesday: The All City Orchestra, made up of 500 student musicians from Toms River Regional intermediate and high schools, will present a free concert and fundraiser at the Ritacco Center, adjacent to High School North on Old Freehold Road. Save the Planetarium Fund volunteers will be there to answer questions and collect donations. All donations from students and other individual donors will qualify for the Save the Planetarium Fund matching gift program, effectively doubling every dollar donated up to \$500.

Saturday: Starting at 8 p.m. at Ocean County College, the Astronomical Society of the Toms River Area (ASTRA) and the Novins planetarium will host the "Spring Star Watch," a free event for people to come see stars and planets using ASTRA members' telescopes. Guests also can bring their own telescopes, and ASTRA members will answer questions about how to best set up and use those optics. Save the Planetarium Fund volunteers will be there accepting donations for the matching gift program and selling T-shirts and teddy bears to raise money.

Mulligan's Bar & Grill at 1850 Hooper Ave. will honor Save the Planetarium donation coupons on every Monday in May, from 11:30 a.m. until 11 p.m. Patrons who present a coupon when paying their bill will get a portion donated to the Save the Planetarium Fund. Coupons are being distributed at the Ocean County College Student Center and fundraising events, and a list of other locations is at the fund Web site [www.SavethePlanetarium.org](http://www.SavethePlanetarium.org).

A new member of the planetarium fund is Derrick H. Pitts, chief astronomer and director of the Fels Planetarium at Philadelphia's Franklin Institute science museum, who joined the group's board of directors, Gamba said. Pitts, who has run the Fels star theater since 1990, is a well-known public spokesman for astronomy who frequently appears as a science commentator on television and as the host of radio station WHYY 91 FM's Star Watch program.

The next Save the Planetarium Fund recruitment and planning meeting will be held at 7 p.m. May 22 at the Knights of Columbus hall at 209 Tennyson Ave., at the corner of Whittier Avenue, just off Route 37 East in Toms River. Gamba said the group is looking for anyone who can help and can especially use people with experience in graphics, grant applications and fundraising.

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