

Planetarium invites public

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TOMS RIVER BUREAU

TOMS RIVER — For the first time since its closure 10 months ago, the Novins Planetarium at Ocean County College opened its night sky to the public Saturday evening.

Pajama Night, a popular program in the past, featured a series of space-related children's books read aloud under the artificial star-filled sky. The college decided to allow special programs to run — despite the building's need for new equipment and renovation — in order to raise money and awareness for the imperiled planetarium.

"We are in a limbo state, but we have a mostly functional theater, so we may as well use it," said planetarium director Gloria Villalobos. "We're looking to do projects now that don't tax our star projector but keep us in the public eye."

Budget cuts and aging equipment forced the planetarium to close late last summer. Hopes were raised earlier this year when pretend-tycoon Edward Devine promised to give the money, until he was exposed as a phony donor.

Since then, the school and community have come together in an intense fundraising effort to afford the \$1.5 million needed to replace everything from the star projector, which currently cannot rotate the stars, to the seats and carpeting.

Proceeds from Pajama Night will go toward the Reach for the Stars campaign started by the college. Another campaign, Save the Planetarium Fund, was organized by concerned residents and also is holding fundraisers.

Pajama Night also will be held June 30, July 28 and Aug. 25. All shows start at 6 p.m. with tickets, priced at \$6, going on sale a half-hour before. Tickets also are available in advance by calling (732) 255-0400, ext. 2111.

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