

OCC plan will help save planetarium

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Ocean County College officials have come up with a sensible plan to reopen the Robert J. Novins Planetarium, update its equipment, renovate part of the facility, and cut into the annual operating deficit.

They will raise \$1.5 million to pay for the facility that was a gift of a charter member of the OCC Board of Trustees.

They have chosen Stephan Leone to lead that fundraising campaign, a wise choice of a man with a proven track record of helping causes to which he lends his support.

The college fund drive will work in tandem with the one launched by Richard Gamba, the Save the Planetarium Fund Inc., a nonprofit organization created before the initiative of the college became known.

The planetarium has been closed because a big cut in state aid to OCC caused it to look for places to cut expenses.

The planetarium, with its outdated equipment and operating deficit, was an easy place to economize. So the numbers-crunchers did what numbers-crunchers do, and the result was an end to the planetarium operation.

Then a benefactor came in, promising millions to update, reopen, and subsidize the planetarium. Only the promises were not backed up with cash.

So the trustees were again faced with the issue of what to do with the planetarium.

Gamba and other enthusiasts pointed to the large number of students from public schools who used to visit the planetarium and its educational value.

It took little prodding for the trustees to come up with a workable plan that will save the Novins planetarium. The fund drive deserves support so this valuable and unique treasure in this area will once again be opening the heavens to students of all ages.

The OCC Foundation has already promised a big gift, the proceeds of its annual gala, where Leone and his wife will be honored as the foundation's humanitarians of the year.

But every \$1 will help. School groups who have, or will, visit the planetarium, can help, too. John and Jill Q. Public can help demonstrate that it does not always take taxes or tuition increases to pay for worthwhile educational facilities.

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