

Donors raise \$700,000 toward reopening Novins Planetarium

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TOMS RIVER — Fundraisers for the Robert J. Novins Planetarium want to reach for the stars — and they're almost halfway there.

Campaign officials announced at a meeting yesterday at Ocean County College with key donors that \$700,000 has been raised toward their \$1.5 million goal.

The goal is to open the facility on the college's campus by September 2008 with new state-of-the-art equipment.

"By this time next year, we will be able to get the equipment needed to (reopen) the planetarium with help from the generous donations we have received today and the money the campaign has raised," said campaign chairman Stephan Leone.

Key donors and amounts announced yesterday are: Stephan and Judith Leone; Rosanne Citta and her family's organization, the Citta Foundation; and David and Roberta Wintrode, who each pledged \$100,000. Additionally, Harvey York, along with his Toms River-based law firm, Novins, York, Pentony and Pagano, pledged \$50,000. College President Jon Larson and his wife Judy pledged \$25,000 with the Ocean County College Foundation agreeing to finance the pledges.

"The most important reason to have the planetarium is for the young lives that go to it and use it," Leone said. "It is for the college students, the children that go for the learning programs and also senior citizens."

"This is a community regional facility with multiple uses," Larson said. "It is not just used for science-related projects, but for other projects as well, such as biology.

"We have gone out to senior citizens communities and to other schools to help raise funds. We are trying to marshal the entire community. Once we get the planetarium open again, it will be a hot ticket. We are proud of this community-wide effort and of the support we have received from our freeholders."

Donors will have five years to pay off their pledges.

"This is a project born out of donors," David Wintrode said.

Leone said that proceeds from the annual Ocean County College Gala, planned for Sept. 8, will go toward the planetarium.

"In the past, the gala has raised about \$250,000, with the help from the sales of ads and tickets," he said.

"The foundation has been involved now for over a year in efforts. Without the help of Stephan Leone, we wouldn't be here today," said York.

"I am pleased to lead this off," said Leone. "We look forward to a successful campaign."

The Ocean County College Foundation is a private nonprofit organization dedicated to the growth and development of the college through scholarships, endowments, capital and special projects.

A private group, Save the Planetarium Inc., was started by members of the community who care about the future of the planetarium and its survival.

Information about the OCC Foundation can be found at www.ocean.edu. Information about Save the Planetarium can be found at www.savetheplanetarium.org.

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