

Candidate Campaign Release - County GOP Renna: County Records Must Be Made Public

The county is buying the Union County Arts Center in Rahway. Though the Freeholders have been presenting the initiative as just an idea, contracts are being signed. The statements being made by officials are contradictory to the facts, and they have refused to discuss the details.

The cost for Phase I (renovations) is estimated to be \$6 million. This does not include the cost to purchase the building and property, which is undisclosed. There is no description or cost for Phase II or Phase III. There is no record provided to the public of the operating cost estimate or what the return would be. This initiative can easily approach \$20 million and continue to be an annual drain. The taxpayers should know what the costs are up front.

The law says the records must be made available to the public. Denial of existence is wrong. The official response from County Counsel in regard to documents pertaining to the Union County Arts Center has been that "they do not exist."

However, the county said the following consultants were called in to do the work over a year ago: MEP, Fire Protection Study from Cosentini Associates, Site and Civil Study from PMK Engineering, Cost Estimation from VJ Associates and Acoustics Study from Cerami Associates. I was told after my OPRA (Open Public Records Act) request that no records exist. The proposal that the Freeholders said was accepted by the

Volunteers Sought

For Trailside Programs
MOUNTAINSIDE - Trailside Nature and Science Center needs volunteers to assist staff naturalists with week-long nature-related day camps for pre-K through sixth-grade students.

Anyone wishing to volunteer should be reliable, have some experience with children, enjoy being outdoors and be able to supply their own transportation to and from Trailside Nature and Science Center. Volunteers are requested to assist for half- or full-day sessions from Monday through Friday for a minimum of one week.

Those interested in volunteering must be at least 13 years of age. Training will be provided. For additional information on volunteering for summer day camps, please telephone Joseph Filo at (908) 789-3670, extension 223.

Trailside Nature and Science Center is located at 452 New Providence Road in Mountainside and is a facility of the Union County Department of Parks and Recreation.

Union County Arts Center Board of Directors also did not materialize.

County Manager George Devanney said, "We are not looking to make money off the Arts Center" and said that the reason for purchasing it is "for an economic development benefit for the City of Rahway."

The use of the Open Space Trust Fund for this purchase and renovation is a misuse of those funds. His wife and administrator of the fund, Angie Devanney, said the plan would "spur hundreds of jobs for Union County residents." She also said, "The plan will raise 'rateables' in Rahway in an attempt to equalize the tax burden." If the benefit is so great, let the city own it.

The numbers being presented do not add up. For instance, the Arts Center's total expenses for 2002 were \$1.96 million. That year it ran a deficit of \$160,000. The \$900,000 in revenue included a \$75,000 grant from the County, \$30,000 from the State and \$50,000 from the City of Rahway. The Arts Center also boasts having a growing list of corporate sponsors, including Merck, and more than 4,000 individual patrons and supporters. The portion of the revenue not donated came from 50,000 paid admissions.

It is difficult to understand how the programming loses money. The Arts Center is only open eight months, from October to May, but they stage 80 events in that time. Ticket prices range from \$20 to \$65, depending on seat location. The center holds more than 1,300 people.

There are too many questions going unanswered, and it is very difficult to support an idea that is not being presented in public and with full candor. I'm concerned that companies are getting "no bid" contracts to do the work. For instance, the county just signed a contract with Joseph Jingoli & Sons for construction management services, a noted big campaign contributor.

Part of the Art Center's mission is to enhance cultural and educational opportunities for children in an urbanized area of New Jersey, where affordable arts and culture are not readily available. This is wonderful, and even worth paying for, except there is no evidence that this is happening.

What people should realize is that the millions being spent on these projects are coming from their property taxes while being doled out to political patrons.

I have much more to say about this and related subjects. Please read joerenna.com/campaign04 and unioncountygop.org/.

Most importantly, give me (and my running mates) your support now and your vote for Freeholder this November. I'll keep you informed.



SUPER HEROES...Sgt. Rock battles the enemy above in the art creation by renowned cartoonist Joe Kubert. Mr. Kubert will discuss the history of comic strips at the Westfield Historical Society dinner on Wednesday, May 26. The public is invited. See story below.

History of Comic Strips To Be Given by Joe Kubert

WESTFIELD - The History of the Comic Strips will be the topic of artist, writer, editor and teacher Joe Kubert's lecture at the Westfield Historical Society's annual dinner. The dinner will be held at the Echo Lake Country Club in Westfield on Wednesday evening, May 26.

Mr. Kubert started his comic strip career at the age of 12 and now at 77 is still an enthusiastic cartoon artist. His examples as a young man were the great cartoon artists such as

John Klock to Relate History of Calendars

FANWOOD - John Klock, of the Historical Society of Scotch Plains and Fanwood and of the Scotch Plains Historical Commission, will trace the evolution of the calendar during the society's monthly meeting on Tuesday, May 25. The meeting will begin at 8 p.m. at the Fanwood train station, located at North and Martine Avenues. All are welcome.

Mr. Klock will explain why there are 24 hours in a day, the creation of the seven-day week, the origin of calendars, the different calendars in use today and the difference between a lunar calendar, solar calendar and sidereal calendar.

He will also discuss the Mayan calendar, whether Stonehenge is a solar calendar and how the Egyptians kept time.

Fellowship and refreshments will follow the meeting. Further information is available by calling Richard Bousquet, Historical Society President, at (908) 232-1199.

Milton Caniff (Terry and the Pirates); Alex Raymond (Flash Gordon); Hal Foster (Tarzan, Prince Valiant) and many other leading cartoonists and illustrators of the 30's and 40's.

In the 70's he drew "Tarzan" for DC Comics, one of his favorite comic strips.

Mr. Kubert has made his own imprint in the cartoon and graphic art world. In 1952 he was the driving force behind the creation of "Three Dimension Comics" featuring Mighty Mouse. His "Fax From Sarajevo" is considered one of the best graphic art forms in the last 10 years. As an artist and illustrator he created his own short stories such as "Sgt. Rock" and "Tor" and also had a daily strip "The Green Berets" for the *Chicago Tribune*. His latest novel is "Yossel," the history of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising as seen through the eyes of a fifteen-year-old boy who loved to draw.

In 1976 he and his wife Muriel founded the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art in Dover, New Jersey. With an international reputation, his students come from such far away places as Japan and Malaysia.

The event will begin with a business meeting at 5:30 p.m. with a report by the Society's president Donal Mokrauer. This will be followed by a social hour at 6:15 and dinner at 7. Two annual awards will be presented during the dinner. The cost of the dinner is \$30 for members and \$35 for non-members. For further information and reservations please call Bob Miller at (908) 233-6360.

Candidate Campaign Release - SP DEM Candidates Propose Tax-Free SP Downtown Alternative

SCOTCH PLAINS - On Tuesday, May 25 the Scotch Plains Township Council will vote on an ordinance to create a Special Improvement District (SID), towards the goal of improving our downtown. The council proposes to accomplish this by imposing an additional property tax on the commercial property owners within the intended district. This proposal comes after commercial and residential property owners alike were hit last year with the largest municipal property tax increase in the history of the Township, an increase that remains in our property tax bills. The money raised will be used to hire a professional downtown manager.

While the idea of a special improvement district is a good one, funding it by an additional property tax is not.

Democratic candidates Andrew Baron for Mayor and Barbara Baldassarre for council propose an alternative plan that would avoid an additional property tax increase.

The Democrats' plan will make effective use of retired individuals who want to apply their business skills in the community. It is worth the effort to find a retired marketing executive through the Service Corps of Retired Executives or similar organization to coordinate expanded efforts to promote the downtown and recruit new businesses.

Increased use of the Small Business Administration, the Union County Economic Development Authority and the State Department of Commerce to work over due. Business interns from Kean University, Union County College and other area colleges will be recruited and put to work applying for public and private grants and performing other time-consuming tasks necessary to make the improvement district work.

Now is not the time to force an additional property tax on our downtown commercial property owners. The additional economic burden of another significant tax increase will not lead to economic growth. This alternative is an example of how Democratic candidates Baron and Baldassarre will strive to improve our community without resorting to increased taxes.

The members of the SID committee worked very hard on this issue and their efforts should be commended. However, a change in direction to avoid increasing the tax burden should be a first step towards a long-range plan to improve the downtown.

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