

Worrell 4/1/04

One step toward Socialism

The only time we ever want to hear the Union County freeholders yell "Cut" is when they are working with the administration in preparing the annual budgets. After all, despite their feelings to the contrary, a freeholder's role, at best, should be relegated to preparing a budget and ensuring that the budget pays for services to residents.

That's why we're opposed to any effort by the Union County Board of Freeholders to acquire the Union County Arts Center in Rahway. Yes, the 75-year-old arts center certainly needs a great deal of work if it wants to shine as a brilliant showplace, but the taxpayers shouldn't be the ones to pay for it year after year after year in their tax bills.

And that is exactly what would happen because once it becomes Union County government's property, it becomes a line item in the budget and the expense is passed to the taxpayer. Quite frankly, the taxpayers have enough of a financial burden on their collective plates without having to add this one to it.

We know it's a done deal, we know the transaction will occur, and it will occur despite what anybody says in opposition to it because that's how the almighty freeholders conduct business — with total disregard to the populace who elected them.

The freeholders have sent a slick mailing to residents of Union County under the guise of showing their interest in what residents think of a county purchase of the arts center. But in traditional form in which they really feign interest, they offer one option: "YES! I enthusiastically support the plan to revitalize the Union County Arts Center as a premier performing arts destination!"

How about a box that says, "No, stop spending my money unnecessarily. We're not stupid. We see all the taxes behind the 'improvement' efforts." They must be afraid that most people would check that box.

We'd absolutely love to see the arts center become a premier showplace with first rate and first run productions. But it should be done by private enterprise, and that needs to be explored before any other options are considered. The last entity that should be able to claim ownership in a venue of entertainment for the public is government. That just pushes us one step closer to socialism and another step away from democracy.