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County arts center a worthwhile project

I am writing to clarify recent remarks made by Summit Mayor Jordan Glatt ("For its next act, theater may be bought by county") that seem to stem from distortions made by his predecessor, Walter Long.

The Board of Chosen Freeholders' goal in acquiring the Union County Arts Center is to stimulate economic development in one of the county's largest urban areas, and to ultimately raise ratables in an attempt to equalize the tax burden, and lessen the load on wealthier municipalities such as Summit, which is already home to the highest-priced homes in the county.

Under the arts center plan, we would create a year-round destination center that would build upon several million dollars worth of public and private investments already under way, and spur the creation of hundreds of jobs for Union County residents. And by the way, Union County would be home to the premier Northern New Jersey arts and entertainment establishment.

This arts initiative has been done successfully in towns such as New Brunswick and Red Bank, and many others across the country.

We hope that Mayor Glatt, unlike his predecessor, will not engage in finger pointing and demagoguery. Since 1998, the municipal portion of Summit's property taxes — the portion that former Mayor Long was responsible for — went up more than 21 percent. School taxes also went up a sizable 15 percent between 2001-2003.

The County of Union has provided well over \$15 million in financial commitments to Summit over the past few years, including more than \$9 million to preserve 63 acres of precious open space, "Field of Dreams" funding for increased recreational opportunities, and the rebuilding and reconstruction of bridges, major roadway and traffic intersections.

The county has even funded more than \$500,000 in improvements to Summit's downtown.

With this investment in the arts center, we can create a model development that all Union County residents will reap economic benefits from, and another destination that we can all take great pride in.

— Angela D. Devanney,
Open Space Recreation
and Historic Preservation
Trust Fund administrator