

The Bernardsville News

Morris County: E Unum Pluribus

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By George Stafford

The writer, a resident of Wharton, a former Democratic state Assembly candidate, owns an advertising and public relations firm. He can be reached at thestafford@optonline.net. His column appears here the first and third weeks of the month, alternating with columnist Leanna Brown, a Republican.

E Unum Pluribus.

Sounds backwards, doesn't it?

Well, it is. The original motto of these United States goes the other way around: E Pluribus Unum, meaning "from many, one." It seems that the founding of this nation came about because many different people got together to successfully oppose British oppression. Puritans from Massachusetts got together with Church of England types in Virginia along with Dutchmen from Jersey and New York, Germans from Pennsylvania, Catholics from Maryland and convicts from Georgia among others, and won our independence.

We did this time and again. We all came together to settle the West - with apologies to the original inhabitants; to create an industrial empire, to beat the Germans twice and the Japanese once, to end the first Great Depression and to establish Civil Rights. This process is known as Democracy.

Another example was the March of Dimes. In the 1930s, polio was a curse on the nation. With the help of Franklin Roosevelt, a polio victim himself, we Americans came together to form the Mother's March of Dimes. The idea was to get a tiny amount of money from each of millions of people to create a fund to defeat "Infantile Paralysis," or polio. And it worked. Millions upon millions of insignificant donations were added up into a big fund that paid for the invention of the Salk and Sabin vaccines. These vaccines are used today around the world to combat polio and have almost eliminated it here. E Pluribus Unum, Democracy at work.

In Morris County, the county executive board, or Board of Freeholders, has turned that idea on its head; E Unum Pluribus, "from one, many."

In the name of tax savings, they cut the amount of money set aside to purchase open space by \$1.6 million. They've never done a very good job at purchasing open space. There is a large fund in the bank they seldom use. So instead of purchasing land that could be preserved for us all, they opted for a tax cut. Thanks to their big tax cut, every man, woman and child in Morris County can count on an extra \$3.21 a year, or 88 percent of a penny every single day in tax savings!

What will you do with your \$3.21? You could save up all year and get a coffee and a doughnut on New Year's Eve - but not at Starbuck's.

Now, there will be those bean-counters who will say that the massive \$1.6 million won't be broken up that way. They will say, and rightly so, that this is a property tax break. Ergo, the more you pay, the more you save! Why, if you have a huge property tax burden, perhaps you might save \$20 in a year! That's almost enough to buy a bottle of decent wine!

The Morris County Freeholders have done the opposite of the March of Dimes. They've taken a significant amount of money and made it insignificant. For all the good it will do any taxpayer in Morris County, they may as well have taken 16,000 hundred dollar bills and set them on fire in the middle of Washington Street in Morristown.

If this is meant to be an attempt to ease the suffering of over-burdened taxpayers, then it is a feeble one. Who is going to notice an average dollar a month less on their county property tax? No, the real purpose of dismembering the county open space program is political. The Tea Party acolytes who run Morris County by bullying the regular Republican politicians wanted to make a statement. The statement they want to make is that E Pluribus Unum is a bad idea. Democracy, government by, for and of the people, is wrong.

Getting together to buy open space to preserve the beauty of our neighborhoods and cut down sprawl is a sin. That's the way these extremists think. Government bad, taxes bad, environment bad; this is the Tea Party mantra. What good is property, they ask, if someone isn't making a buck from it?

Open space in America's most densely populated state is simply precious. But from a strictly utilitarian standpoint, open space enhances the value of surrounding property, creates oxygen, recharges groundwater and lessens runoff that can lead to flooding. All of these things have financial value. But understanding that concept requires a skill Tea Party acolytes simply don't have, which is the ability to think.

Any group of people who turn \$1.6 million into 88 percent of a penny a day and think they accomplished something wonderful clearly lack adequate mental capacity.

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