

# Unfair Criticism

## Discovery Museum Merits Support, Not Barriers

By JOHN H. MORRISON III

### OPEN FORUM

I have been waiting for the dust to settle over the funding issue for the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum by the City of Winchester.

As a new resident of the area (20.5 years), I have watched and even participated in efforts to improve our city. I must say that I have learned to love the City of Winchester, and my family and I have developed many wonderful relationships. We are proud to call it home.

I am writing this to express my appreciation for the efforts of a few exceptional individuals in developing the Discovery Museum. The hard core of the few were three women: Peggy McKee, Martha Wolfe, and Mary Bruce Glaize. They started nine years ago with a dream and a vision.

While they attracted others, these three women have stopped at nothing to fulfill their vision for a science-based learning laboratory for children. They started with a small storefront and, after several years, expanded their space. The quality of their exhibits has always been first-rate.

The vision for the museum, however, has been for a facility that would provide for first-class exhibit and teaching space. With the help of Reader and Swartz Architects, a world-class, cost-effective museum has been designed. The funding has

come from federal, state, and local individuals, foundations, and businesses.

I would like to praise the city for allocating land at Jim Barnett Park for the new facility. The City of Winchester and Frederick County have provided only minimal, in my opinion, financial support. I have worked in non-profits as a volunteer for the past 45 years and can appreciate the tenacity of the museum staff in forging ahead.

I find that the recent criticism of the museum for serving only upper class children to be unfair. The museum would love to have more outreach as a part of its programming. The hard truth is that the museum has had to struggle to meet its operating expenses. There has been just the minimal amount of funds to keep its doors open.

I find it very interesting that the city is thrilled to show off the museum when they have visitors. The museum recently hosted a party for children's literature leaders from throughout the country. When Gov. Warner visited this summer, the museum was his first stop. It seems to me that the area is enormously enriched by the current and planned museum.

As a taxpayer, I am embarrassed by the recent turmoil and conditions put on the museum for such a small financial contribution.

If City Council wants the museum to expand the scope of its outreach, let them pay for it. What the museum needs from the city and the other localities is bold leadership, backed by financial support, not unfounded criticism. Give the museum supporters encouragement; don't make them gravel.

The museum will succeed with or without the full support of City Council, I am sure. Nothing will stop its progress. Thank God that we have such strong inspirational leadership within our non-profit community. It is so sad that we lack supporting leadership among certain members of our elected council.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that I am not affiliated with the museum in any way. This letter represents my personal observations. I only hope that the local governments will come to realize the quality of the gift that has been provided to us. Raising the level of life in a community is achieved through the exceptional efforts of its private citizens, not normally initiated by government.

It is the role of effective government leadership to recognize and encourage these efforts and not to establish barriers. I would strongly hope that the entire region would understand the value of the museum in uplifting our community.

*Open Forum is a column available to Star readers to address a subject of their choice. John H. Morrison III is a resident of Winchester.*