

11-22-88

AS COMMENT

The Central New Jersey  
**Home News**

Sunday newspaper established 1786.  
Daily newspaper established 1879.

## Twenty-five years after Dallas

**T**he shots that rang out in horror across Dealey Plaza 25 years ago today echo across a quarter-century of turbulent history to remind us of John F. Kennedy the man — larger in death than he was in life — and to remind us also of the legacy of the Kennedy 1,000 days, a legacy of hope and promise for the nation.

Memories of that tragic day provide Americans of that generation with the link to history. "Where were you when John Kennedy was shot?" is the question that wrenches us back to those traumatic days and unites us in memories of our common loss.

And, "What if he had lived?" is the question that trails off into thin air as it triggers images of the Kennedy style and grace that pervaded the White House and captured the imagination of millions of Americans and people around the world. An administration that initiated a host of progressive programs — many of them enacted after Kennedy's death — it also was an administration that raised more hopes than it fulfilled.

But what about those Americans too young to relive the days of Camelot? Those people who know the legend, but know little about the man? Now, 25 years later — after the other terrible assassinations, after Vietnam, Watergate and the disgrace of the Nixon presidency, the hostage crisis, the Iran-Contra scandal — what is the Kennedy legacy for the youth of today? Is it bound up only in the newspaper and magazine stories, books and television documentaries?

Kennedy was the president who planted the seeds of Medicare and conceived a Cabinet-level department

to deal with urban problems. This was the president who proposed a \$10 billion tax cut to spur the economy. And this was the president who by executive order in 1961 created the Peace Corps, perhaps his most popular program.

While he was far from a perfect man, the legacy Kennedy passed on to Americans of all ages is one of vitality, dedication and compassion; that this great country with its enormous wealth of both material goods and the energy of its people is a nation secure in the knowledge that it can make a difference.

Moreover, the legacy that endures is the vision the young president had of a nation that accepts the challenges and moves resolutely to address the problems. The horrors of Dallas 25 years ago may have shattered the idealism of the American presidency, but the challenge John Kennedy issued in his inaugural address is just as appropriate today as it was then: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."