

# Southern Skies

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Winter 2012



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Sun Pillar Credit: Adam Thanz

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**April Whitt**  
**Jim Cherry Memorial Planetarium**  
**Atlanta, GA**

When you read this near the March solstice, our next SEPA gathering will be only four months away. Jon Elvert is hosting us just prior to the IPS meeting in Baton Rouge. Here's your chance to do two things at once (another chance, actually, since I suspect most of us juggle multiple tasks at one time).

Rates and submission formats for advertising space in SEPA's quarterly journal *Southern Skies* are:

Rates	Dimensions
\$100.	Full-page 7" wide x 10" high
\$50.	Half-page 7" wide x 4.5" high
\$25.	Quarter-page 3" wide x 4" high

These rates are per issue and in B&W copy. The entire back cover or inside back cover of our journal is also available either in B&W for \$125, or in color for \$150. A 10% discount to any size ad can be offered only with a year's (four issues) commitment of advertising. Ads accepted on a space available basis. Ads must be camera ready and conform to dimensions listed. Payment must accompany advertisement order, made payable to the Southeastern Planetarium Association (send payment to Secretary/Treasurer Patsy Wilson). The underlying mission of our advertisements is to promote resources, products, and services related to the planetarium profession. SEPA reserves the right to refuse advertisements.

And better yet, it's an election year! Elsewhere in this issue are the candidates' bios. Take a few minutes to read over their information. Think about who your leaders will be for the next few years (provided the world doesn't end in December...)

This election is probably quite as important as the one coming up in November. (You know, THAT one.) We need you and your vote in

Baton Rouge at the end of July.

Your Council is discussing ways to make it easier for SEPA members to attend both the SEPA and IPS conferences. We're working on funding for the SEPA part (it will cost you nothing to attend that one – just get yourself here and pay for a room somewhere) and for the IPS part as well. Keep any eye out for information.

And finally, I'd like to share some wisdom from planetarium veteran, Sam Storch. It states perfectly my wishes for each of us. On January first, he wrote:

"Tonight, I had a special moment when, just after midnight, we went out the back into the yard and saw Sirius right on the meridian.

"I had done that both on the domed sky and in the real one for over four decades, and hope that "out there" perhaps at least one person will recall that I'd showed nature's special gift from the sky.

"And so it is, in our time, that the sky places its brightest nighttime star at its highest, being a mark for the coming year. This happens every year in our lives as the heavens announce the beginning of another trip around the Sun with the hope that it will be bright and sparkling, exuberant and crisp.

"May you and those important to you enjoy that kind of year."

# IPS REPORT

**John Hare**  
**ASH Enterprises**  
**Bradenton, FL**

The International Planetarium Society, IPS, will hold their biennial conference July 22-26 in Baton Rouge, LA. SEPA members will have the added opportunity to combine the annual SEPA conference with the IPS conference. SEPA will have their annual banquet on the evening of June 21st followed by paper sessions on Sunday, June 22nd. The SEPA business meeting will take place on the afternoon of July 26th.

SEPA has arranged for a block of rooms at the Belle of Baton Rouge hotel, at the discounted rate of \$119 for single or double occupancy.

Because of generous vendor support and a healthy bottom line, SEPA will cover the cost of the banquet and paper sessions. Delegates will be responsible for their own hotel charges. Additional conference

support may be available for "full" SEPA members. Be sure to check the SEPA Website, <sepadomes.org>, for support options.

IPS will officially open with a welcoming reception starting at 17:30 on the 22nd. If you've previously attended an IPS conference you already know the benefits.

Membership dues in IPS is \$65 for 1-year and \$100 for 2-years. Application forms and more information are available at <www.ips-planetarium.org>

It is important for SEPA to have good representation in Baton Rouge since this is an election year and a quorum of 25% is required to conduct official business. Please attend if you can. Not only will SEPA benefit from your participation, but YOU will benefit even more from the combined meetings.

As always, don't hesitate to contact me about anything regarding IPS.

## Paul Campbell Fellowship Award Nomination Form

Nominees must have been a member of SEPA for at least ten years, and they must display qualities in each of five areas, as represented by the five-pointed star shaped award: integrity, friendship, service, knowledge, and vision. Please submit this form to any SEPA Council member.

Nominee's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Qualifications: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

# Editor's Message

**James Sullivan**  
**Buehler Planetarium & Observatory**  
**Davie, FL**

tion of the Coordinator for Kentucky. It's not easy being a State Coordinator - it can get lonely, sort of like the ol' Maytag repairman. So, pipe off a note to

(Continued on page 11)

As I've mentioned several times before, my favorite part of *Southern Skies* is *News from SEPA Region*. I just like reading what is going on in the individual planetariums. In a way, I feel like I have gotten a letter from friends.

However, some of you don't write! There is a list of the State Coordinators along with their email addresses on page 30. Figure out which is yours, and please let him/her know what you are doing. If you're not doing anything and they've closed your facility, we'll all commiserate. Tell us what you are doing, and we'll probably steal ideas from you.

I wish to thank Steve Russo for accepting the posi-



## SEPA Membership Form

Please send your check to SEPA, c/o Patsy Wilson, Margaret C. Woodson Planetarium, 1636 Parkview Circle, Salisbury, NC 28144.

\_\_\_\_\_ One Year, \$25 (\$15 outside SEPA geographical region)

\_\_\_\_\_ Two Years, \$40

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Planetarium \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State / Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Voice Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Fax Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Staff Position \_\_\_\_\_

IPS Member? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Contribution to Scholarship Award Account: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

# Small Talk

Elizabeth Wasiluk  
Berkeley County Planetarium  
Hedgesville, WV

As I write this, we stand at the edge of 2011 and look forward to 2012. What a year it has been.

I don't know about you, but has the economy had an effect on you? I noticed a distinctive slow down of programs this year. I did not do many programs this fall, but one that sticks out was the program I did of hands-on star identification where an autistic child and her mom, whose father and husband were in Iraq, came to the planetarium and the three of us grabbed a star map and identified stars in the December sky. I altered the sky with the latitude control to match Florida, since they were going to Disney World to take part in special activities for children whose fathers were in the service. I asked if their loved one was coming home at the end of the month, and they said no, not him. So I altered the sky and we discussed the changes in the southern versus the more northerly sky we had looked at earlier in the program and then looked at how things looked in binoculars or a small telescope. We also discussed the close pairing of the crescent moon and Venus in the sky after Christmas on December 26. I had tried to get a picture of it, when it actually happened, but the fog rolled in and I was unable to photograph it.

Anyway, doing this program is just an example of how I can do a special one-on-one program in the planetarium, or two-on-one program, in this case. If you run a tiny planetarium and do

not charge an admission as I do, as this is easy to do. I don't think this type of specialized program could be done in a big planetarium. Last year I did a program on the upcoming total lunar eclipse program for a senior citizen married couple who later phoned and told me that they got up early and watched the lunar eclipse together and had a marvelous time and would be unaware of it, if they had not come to see my program. That's why I like to focus things on events going on in the sky that the general public can go out and look at themselves.

Coming up in 2012 is the conjunction of Jupiter and Venus in March, which I hope you will talk about with your visitors this coming year, as they're being so bright, everyone will wonder about them and ask questions. What a great time to talk about what a conjunction is and how Venus and Jupiter are not really close together actually in space. You can also talk about Venus and the Venus Express spacecraft and what it found out as well as Jupiter and the Juno spacecraft headed there right now.

Also coming up is the Transit of Venus in June. Although it will not be as prominent as the one that happened a few years back, perhaps you can go into the details and history as to why the "Transit of Venus" is so rare and what the history behind it is.



December 10, 2011 Lunar Eclipse  
Image: Conrad Jung

As we look back at 2011, we see many historic and interesting events that have happened. The space shuttle was retired and we will never see it fly again. We watched as world wide attention was called on a supernova in M101. (You can see a picture of it taken by Conrad Jung of Chabot Observatory in Oakland, CA in the December issue of *Sky*

(Continued on page 11)

# BOOKENDS

Robin Byrne  
Bays Mountain Planetarium  
Kingsport, TN

## *The Moon and the Western Imagination* by Scott L. Montgomery

The ole bookshelf is calling, and this time I picked up "The Moon and the Western Imagination" by Scott L. Montgomery. Montgomery is a geologist, who clearly also has an interest in art and culture. However, his writing style definitely reflects more of the geology background than his other interests. Sadly, this book was not exactly riveting to read, which is a shame, because the content had the potential to be quite interesting.

Montgomery takes us through a chronological journey of ideas and images related to the Moon. However, the journey, as the book title suggests, is limited to Western concepts. No other cultures are incorporated. So, naturally, under these conditions, the story begins with the Greeks and remains within Europe throughout the text.

From tales of the Moon's origins to artistic representations to scientific observations, the book is rich with information. Early conflicting ideas about whether the Moon would be inhabited, or not, were entertaining. Even early notions of how men could journey to the Moon were discussed. All of this should have been fascinating to read, but Montgomery's writing style kept getting in the way.

Many chapters were devoted to the changing way in which the Moon has been represented in works of art. Montgomery goes into much detail about many art pieces and the significance of various represen-

tations. Sadly, very few of these images are actually reproduced in the book, leaving the reader to either use their imagination, or read the book while searching the internet for each image discussed.

The last section of the book deals with the earliest telescopic observations of the Moon. Galileo's famous sketches of craters set the standard, with a realism rarely matched by many who tried to follow his example. Then the politics of naming lunar features is discussed, which I found to be the most intriguing part of the book. Many naming schemes were put forth, but the one we use today, and many of the names still in use, was meant to represent both scientists who were in favor of a geocentric universe and those who proposed a heliocentric model. However, if you look at the craters' locations and size, it is clear to see that the geocentrists were favored.

All in all, "The Moon and the Western Imagination" is an informative, if not exciting, book to read. As a source for research, it would be quite useful. As a book to curl up with, only if you are suffering from insomnia would I recommend it.



# Archeo- astronomy

## *A Black, Round Spot that Moved the World*

Woodrow W. Grizzle III  
Elizabeth City State University Planetarium  
Elizabeth City, NC

*A black, round spot,—and that is all;  
And such a speck our earth would be  
If he who looks upon the stars  
Through the red atmosphere of Mars  
Could see our little creeping ball  
Across the disk of crimson crawl  
As I our sister planet see.*

-Excerpt from *The Flaneur*, Boston Common,  
December 6, 1882  
by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.



The 2004 transit of Venus is seen in early morning clouds as the Sun rose on June 8, 2004. ©2004 David Cortner, used with permission.

The name of the game is wandering. Worlds wandering in the firmament. People wandering upon the earth. Going forth in pursuit of science. Occasionally, the worlds will align in such a way as to induce

wandering among the people of Earth. Transits are such events, particularly the transits of Venus. One of the rarest of all astronomical apparitions, it was once written that “it is quite possible that, except for interplanetary travel, there will never be astronomical expeditions to equal in duration and severity made for [the transits of Venus].”

Although ancient cultures knew of the planets, with some even charting the motions of Venus to a high degree, none mentions a transit event. It is entirely possible that someone in antiquity observed a transit, as telescopes are not required, but there is nothing to indicate such in the historical record.

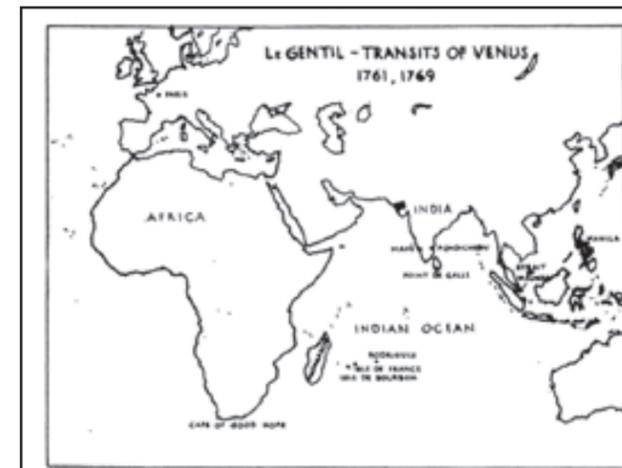
The first mention of someone observing a transit came from the Persian polymath Avicenna, who claimed to have observed the transit of May 24, 1032. He used this observation to conclude that Venus was nearer to Earth than the Sun in the Ptolemaic model. He published his findings as part of his *Compendium of the Almagest*, an Almagest commentary.

Skip forward to A.D. 1627, when Johannes Kepler became the first person to predict a transit of Venus, which later occurred in 1631. Kepler calculated a near-miss transit for 1639. At that time, it was yet to be determined that transits occur in pairs separated by eight years.

At some point, someone got the idea that the transits of Venus could be used to provide data for calculating the distance between Earth and Sol through triangulation. In the 1630's, English astronomer Jeremiah Horrocks recalculated Kepler's Venus orbital data to find that a bona fide transit of Venus would, indeed, occur in 1639. It was Horrocks who first realized that transits of Venus occur in eight-year pairs. He holds the singular distinction of being the only person to predict the 1639 transit, and one of only two who observed and recorded it (the other being William Crabtree, a colleague of Horrocks). He fashioned a simple telescope and used it to project a Solar image onto a card where he safely observed the transit. The weather was dicey that day, but he was able to gather sufficient data to estimate both the size of Venus and the Earth-Sun distance. His figure of 95.6 gigameters was off from the true value (149.6 gigameters) by about 37%, but his was still far more accurate than any previously derived value.

It was in 1716 that Sir Edmund Halley, who famously first calculated the orbit of a comet about the Sun (the eponymous *Halley's Comet*), that suggested that the upcoming transits of Venus in 1761 and 1769 be observed from all corners of the world so that the distance from Earth to Sol could at long last be calculated. This was to be done by first gleaming the Solar parallax from timing differences of the four contacts of the transit between world observation sites. Under Halley's encouragement, the nations of the world devised observation plans and assembled teams with the talent necessary to successfully make the observations. The Venus transit expeditions were perhaps one of the first instances of international collaboration in the history of science.

Perhaps the most infamous of these voyages was the wanderings of Guillaume LeGentil of France. LeGentil was sent out to the French colony of Pondicherry, India. Setting out on the eve of a spark of the Seven Years' War in 1760, LeGentil thought it dangerous to sail for Pondicherry and looked elsewhere instead. After roaming about, first leaving, and then returning to Île de France, LeGentil encountered the transit day while at sea. He, of course found it impossible to make accurate observations with the vessel bobbing about, and, after traveling so far for naught, decided to remain in the Indian Ocean for eight years awaiting the next transit. He wandered around, mapping Madagascar, encountering Spanish hostility as far away as the Phillipines, and, eventually, finding himself



This map shows the locations of LeGentil's many stops during his 11-year odyssey to observe the transits of Venus in 1761 and 1769.

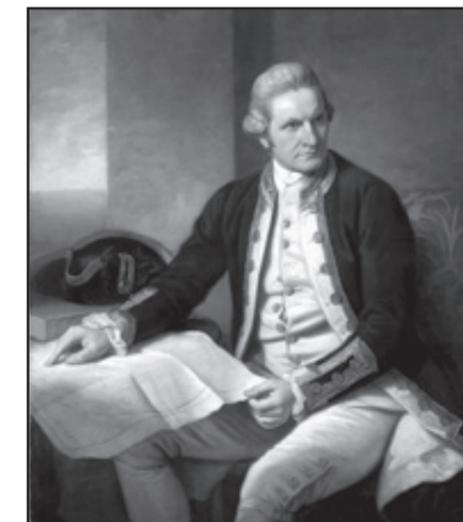
in Pondicherry (his original destination) in 1768. Pondicherry was now safe as the war had cooled at this point. LeGentil settled and built an observatory there, only to encounter heavy clouds on the day of the transit. The experience nearly drove him mad.

His is perhaps the saddest tale of the pursuit of Venus transits. To make matters worse, upon returning to Paris in 1771, he found that he had been declared dead, his wife remarried, and his estate plundered by “heirs.” The king eventually had to intervene before all could be set right. Ultimately, LeGentil then died in the upheaval of the French Revolution.

More fortunate was the tale of Englishmen James Cook, Daniel Solander, and Charles Green. These men were sent out by the Royal Society of London to observe the 1769 transit from the newly discovered island of Tahiti in the South Pacific. They also had an ulterior motive of locating and mapping a legendary southern continent referred to as *Terra Australis Incognita*, which is today known as Australia.

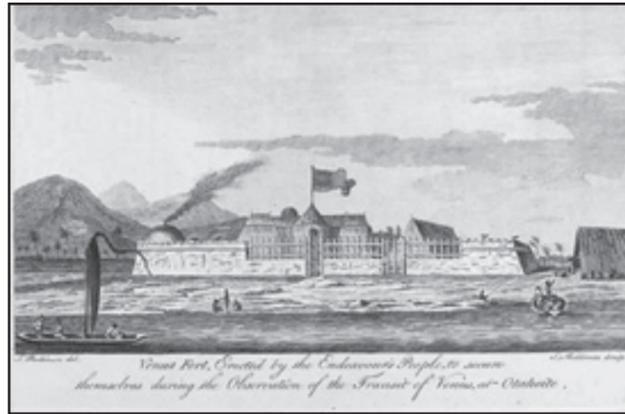
Cook, Solander, and Green enjoyed great success in observing the transit of June 1769, but even their observations were not without a hitch. Their recorded contact timings varied greatly and, as such, were not as accurate as was hoped to yield a value for the Earth-Sun distance. The culprit was the now famous black drop effect, which causes Venus to appear as a hazy black drop during second and third contact. This blurring effect makes timing these two contacts difficult.

Upon returning to England, Cook and Solander pre-

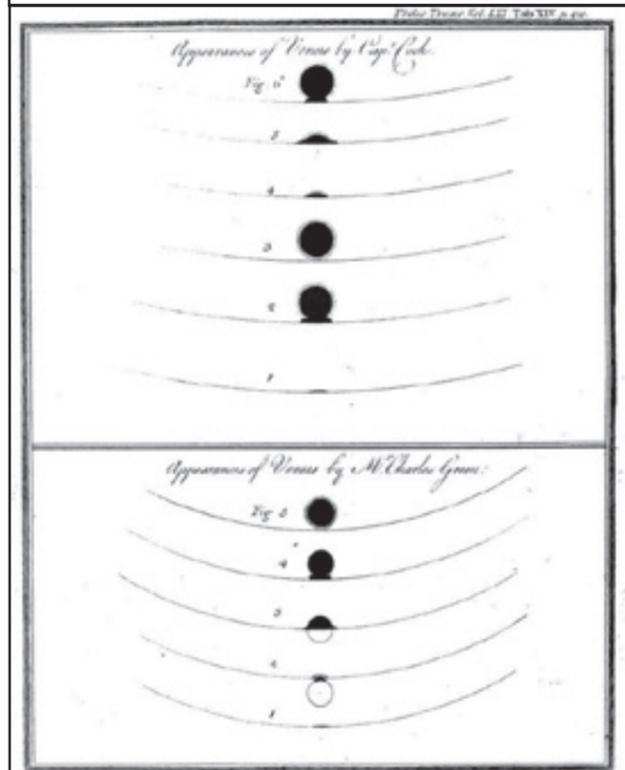


Captain James Cook  
by Nathaniel Dance,  
c.1775. Oil on canvas.  
National Maritime Museum.

sented their data to an underwhelmed Royal Society. Green had succumbed to dysentery on the way home, and so the Society decided to blame him for the whole debacle. Cook protested on grounds that it was unfair to blame Green, as he was not present to present his data or defend himself. Regardless, other astronomers from around the world reported



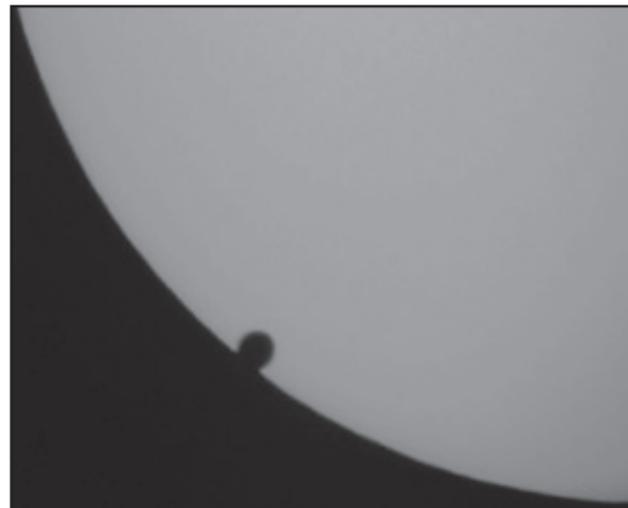
Fort Venus, Tahiti, c. 1769. Pen and ink. This fortification on the northern side of Tahiti, Point Venus, was constructed by Cook and his men two days after making landfall. It housed the observatory, smithy, kitchen, and quarters in 54 tents.



Observation sketches of Captain Cook and Charles Green, 1769. Pen and ink. These sketches made by Cook and Green clearly indicate the black drop effect, which greatly reduced the timing accuracy for second and third contacts of the transit.

seeing the same black drop effect. Despite the data being less accurate than hoped, it still proved useful enough to calculate the AU to within 2% of its currently accepted value.

The transits of 1874 and 1882 were the first to occur in the age of photography. They also provided additional solar parallax data, which were used by American astronomer Simon Newcomb, along with data from previous transits, to further refine the AU value to 149.59 gigameters, a value terribly close to that determined by space probes to be approximately 149.6 gigameters.



Black drop effect. This image from the 2004 transit clearly shows a mild case of the black drop effect.

The transit of 2004 was eagerly anticipated by many for both the awe of it as well as for a new scientific pursuit: the search for extrasolar planets. Looking for drops in stellar magnitude due to transiting planets is one way astronomers search for these remote worlds. The Venus transit of 2004 gave astronomers an idea of what to look for in other stars systems. It was found that Venus caused only a 0.001 magnitude drop as it transited the Sun, meaning that instruments would have to be highly sensitive to measure such a drop in the case of other stars.

What wonders are in store for the transit of 2012? Will the alignment be a precursor to planetary destruction supposedly foretold by the Mayans? Perhaps not, but it is certain that millions of people all over the world will be looking up that day. What will you think of then? The travails of LeGentil? Tahiti? Maybe you will think about the fact that



Newspaper Clipping from June 9, 2004. The transit of 2004 was the author's first public astronomy outreach since starting at this first planetarium: Bays Mountain Park & Planetarium in Kingsport, Tennessee.

your grandchildren's children will be the next to see such spectacle. Or perhaps you will simply marvel at the motions of the firmament and take stock in visible proof that the universe is working exactly as it should.

**References:**

Cook, James. *The Endeavor Journals 1 & 2*. 1768-1771. Digitized by the National Library of Australia. < <http://nla.gov.au/nla.ms-ms1>>, < <http://www.nla.gov.au/pub/endeavour/index.html>>.

Halley, Dr. Edmund. A New Method of Determining the Parallax of the Sun, or His Distance from the Earth, Sec. R.S., No. 348. p. 454.

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*Small Talk (Continued from page 6)*

and *Telescope's* magazine, in their "News" section.) You may have also seen the live footage of the flyby of an asteroid that just whizzed by us, getting closer to Earth than the moon. Both NASA and the Keck observatories had either a movie or web cast. Most of us on the East coast, did not get to see the last lunar eclipse, but due to the web, many of use were able to show it to our visitors and explain why they were unable to see it in their sky.

As the twelve days of Christmas wind down as I write this and get ready to give my astronomy class its midterm exam and I check out my collection of "Star of Bethlehem" articles and books and you wind down your "Star of Bethlehem" or other holiday planetarium program or laser show, I wish you peace, good crowds for your programs and that I will be able to see you in 2012 at both the South Eastern Planetarium Association meeting and the International Planetarium Society meeting in Baton Rouge, LA and we can discuss some of this stuff in person, but if you cannot wait until then, by all means write or e-mail me ideas so I can put them in my next column as to how your small planetarium is looking forward to 2012 and the events that will happen then. Perhaps something wonderful will happen that no one has been able to foresee. Let's keep a good thought.

*Editor's Message (Continued from page 5)*

your coordinator, and we'll see you in the journal!

We can receive electronic files in most any format. Also, graphics can be received electronically or in hardcopy, including slides or photos, and will be converted to digital with sufficient resolution.

Submission deadlines: January 1 (Winter), April 1 (Spring), July 1 (Summer), October 1 (Fall).

Thanks to Broward College and its wonderful printing department for assistance.



**Patsy Wilson**  
**Margaret C. Woodson Planetarium**  
**Salisbury, NC**

Greetings from your SEPA Secretary/Treasurer!

\$ By this time you should have received an email indicating the date your membership expires. Please keep that as a record to avoid overpayment.

\$ As you begin thinking about registering for IPS, remember that SEPA will meet briefly before IPS begins. This is an election year so you want to be in good standing! Some of you will need to renew your membership July 1st. There will be no option to renew membership as part of the IPS registration.

\$ The 2011 Year-End Financial Report is included in this issue. As you review that document, here are some things to remember:

- The report is from 2/15/11 onward. Mickey Jo Sorrell, the previous treasurer, was handling the funds until that time. Her 2010 report included information through 2/15/11.
- The report doesn't reflect profit, vendor support for the professional development fund or dues paid at the 2011 conference. Those amounts were received in January 2012 and will be reported next year.

**2011 Year End Financial Report**  
**Southeastern Planetarium Association**  
**Submitted by Patsy Wilson**  
**January 9, 2011**

All funds held at Branch Banking and Trust Company, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

**Balances as of 12/31/11:**

Operating	23,159.99
Savings	25,554.71
Scholarship	<u>7,444.19</u>
Total	56,158.89

**Operating Account**

Balance (02/15/11) **25,064.58**

Income:

Full Membership	1,075.00 **
Associate Membership	75.00 **
Journal Ads	2,460.00
"The Planets"	100.00
Donation	10.00
Total Income	<b>3,720.00</b>
Total credits	<b>28,784.58</b>

Disbursements:

Journal (five issues)	3,112.19
Postage	10.20
Bank Charge	21.00
Plaques	103.35
John Hare (1/3 travel to IPS Council)	1,077.85
Total Debits	<b>(5,624.59)</b>
<b>Balance (12/31/11)</b>	<b>23,159.99</b>

\*\* This total does not reflect the dues paid at registration for the 2011 conference. Those funds (\$1,655.00) were received after 12/31/11.

<b>Savings Account (02/15/11)</b>	<b>24,649.59</b>
Transfer for Prof. Development Fund	800.00
Interest earned	<u>105.12</u>
<b>Balance (12/31/11)</b>	<b>25,554.71</b>

<b>Professional Development Scholarship Account (02/15/11)</b>	<b>7,867.19</b>
Auction (2011 Conf.)	377.00
Total Credits	8,244.19

Disbursements: Prof. Dev. Award	800.00
<b>Balance (12/31/11)</b>	<b>7,444.19</b>



As the smallest of our Fidelity™ theater solutions, Fidelity GO™ is everything you dream of from a planetarium system... with uncompromised performance, unrivalled simplicity, and an incredible price.



- A complete planetarium system for domes up to 14-meters/46-ft in diameter.
- Solid-state technology... no lamp changes, low power consumption, minimal maintenance and stunning contrast and color.
- New Uniview 1.4 for real-time astronomy presentations, integrated video playback, layered media support and show production.
- Fidelity GO projection system – our exclusive blending and lens technologies already in-built.
- Access to the latest GIS visualizations, WMS/KML datasets and atmospheric effects.
- Complete media center with pixel management, distortion correction, media storage and playback.
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# SciDome XD

Extreme-resolution fulldome education is here. The new SciDome XD delivers over 2500 x 2500 pixels, and a stunning 8,000+ lumens for unbelievably bright, crisp starfields and graphics. Like all Spitz systems, XD offers the most comprehensive educational resources available, and the ease of use educators expect from SciDome - including the AutoWarp self alignment system.



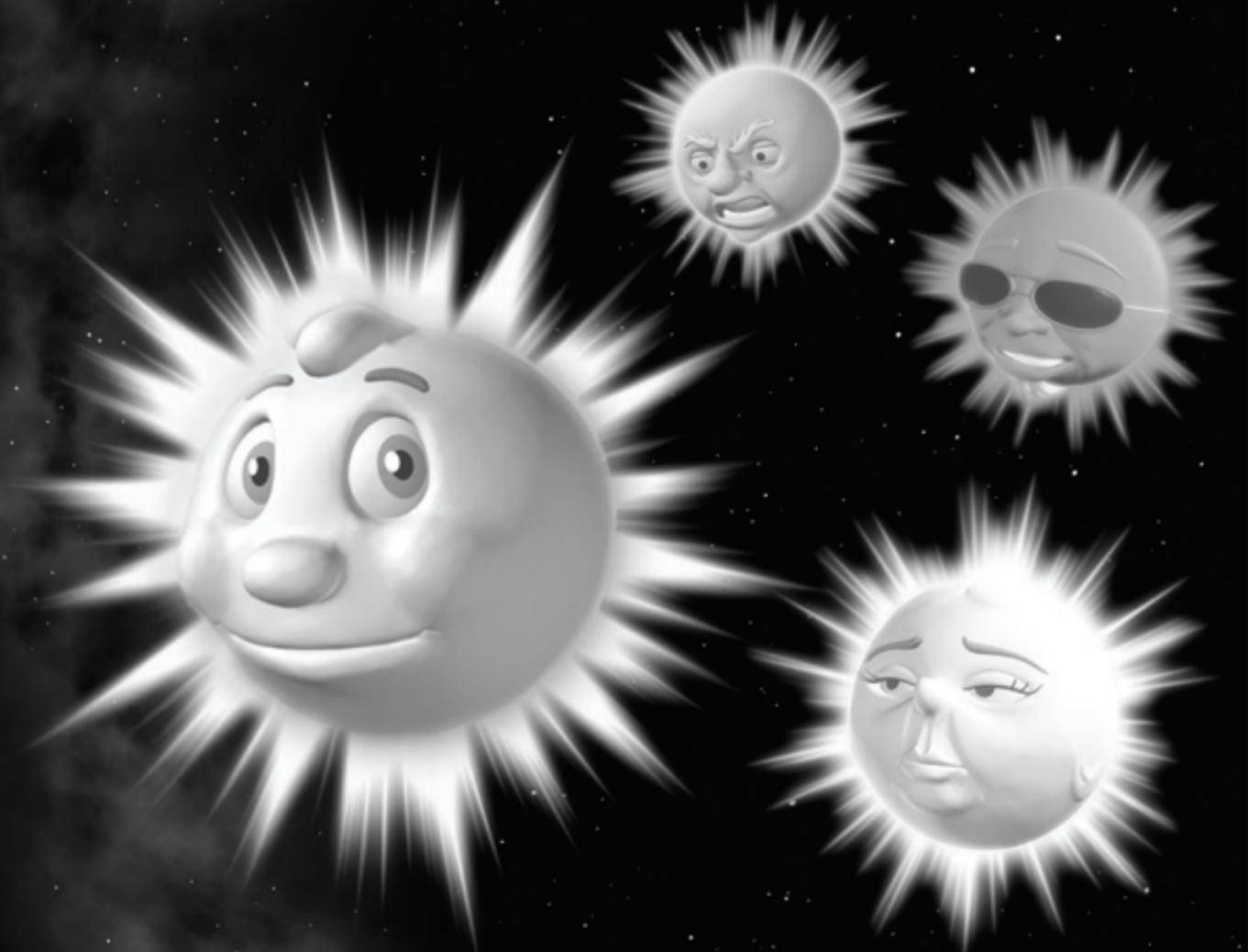
Want a closer look at SciDome XD? Join us Wednesday May 4th for an open house at our Chadds Ford PA facility  
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# The Little Star That could



Sometimes, being average can also be special.



# A Week in ITALY for an American PLANETARIUM OPERATOR



**Susan Button**  
OCM BOCES Planetarium  
Syracuse, NY

Each year, in the spring, the Serafino Zani Astronomical Observatory (Lumezzane/Brescia) will host an American Planetarium Operator, whose native tongue is English, to work with high school students of English. In the past this contest was only available for STARLAB educators. **This newly revised contest will accept applications from educators or astronomers who work with any of the various models of planetariums.**

The International Planetarium Society (IPS) endorses this initiative as an excellent opportunity for professional development and cultural exchange.

#### The winner will:

1. be asked to provide a curriculum vita and the text of a lesson plan with activities and stories.
2. be asked to prepare the lesson for an analog projector but it may be augmented with digital visuals on a flash drive. Each lesson will be at least 60 minutes in length and can be about traditional topics for planetaria such as: daily motion, orienteering, latitude motion, solstice and equinox,

3. be asked to make a public presentation. The presenter will provide an introduction with slides about U.S. experiences in the diffusion of astronomy and then a lesson.
4. receive a maximum of \$1000 for transportation from the United States. Bed and meals will be provided during this professional visit. (Additional expenses for tourist travel, hotel and meals must be paid by the applicant.)
5. need to be available for a maximum of 10-12 days in Italy in conjunction with the Italian Association of Planetaria (PLANIT) yearly conference.
6. be asked to make presentations in a minimum of 3 cities (maximum 5 cities).

Example: 2 days in Perugia for the conference, 4 days in Brescia (3 morning classes each day), 4 days near Gorizia.

All lessons and presentations will be conducted in the English language. A preliminary text of the lesson is required so that teachers will have ample time to work with their students before the experience. Be prepared to teach the lesson at either a basic or an advanced level. Some classes are extremely interested but do not know a lot of astronomy and others have studied

astronomy in depth. Most of the students have had two to four years of English and will understand the spoken word if you speak clearly and deliberately. They have a good sense of humor and certainly display the usual excitement about the planetarium.

There will be time when there are no other engagements, thus providing an opportunity for touring the locale and nearby cities. For instance, Lumezzane is very rich in public astronomy with the Serafino Zani Astronomical Observatory, four small planetaria, the Eureka Astronomical Center and the National Archive of Planetaria. The province of Brescia is very interesting with its natural landscapes and parks, three lakes and a most important valley for prehistoric age stone engravings. Exciting artistic cities, such as Verona and Venice, are nearby and can be reached by taking a one or two-hour train ride.

#### Culminating documentation:

We request a final report be written by the American teacher which will include the text of the High School lesson, comments from the students and impressions of the experience.

**September 15 is the yearly deadline for the applicants of "A Week in Italy for an American Planetarium Operator."**

#### Application Procedure:

Participants must send an application that includes your full name, complete address, year of birth and your curriculum vitae. Send this information along with a cover letter, explaining why you wish to be considered for this experience. You must also include the text of lesson plans, with activities, and stories that you would like to present for the students and for the public. Please include a list of specialized vocabulary or any other relevant materials that you feel would strengthen your application.

#### Send your application to:

Loris Ramponi  
Osservatorio Serafino Zani  
Via Bosca 24  
25066 Lumezzane – Italy  
email: [osservatorio@serafinozani.it](mailto:osservatorio@serafinozani.it)  
or [megrez58@gmail.com](mailto:megrez58@gmail.com)

#### Winners of the "Week in Italy" for an American planetarium operator (since 1995):

Susan Reynolds Button (OCM BOCES Planetarium, Syracuse, New York); Jeanne E. Bishop (Westlake School Planetarium, Ohio); Jerry Vinski (Planetarium of the Raritan Valley Community College, New Jersey); Dee Wanger (Discovery Center Science Museum, Fort Collins, Colorado); April Whitt (Fernbank Science Center, Atlanta, Georgia); Raymond Shubinski (East Kentucky Center for Science, mathematics & Technology); Andrea Lee Pisacano (Kauai Children's Discovery Museum, Hawaii); Dayle Brown (Production, Indiana, USA); John T. Meader (Northern Stars Planetarium, Fairfield, Maine); Corey Radman (Discovery Center Science Museum, Fort Collins, Colorado), Carolyn R. Kaichi (Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawaii), Michele Wistisen (Casper Planetarium, Casper, Wyoming), Joseph E. Ciotti (Hokulani Imaginarium, Kaneohe, Hawaii), Stephen R. McNeil (Brigham Young University Planetarium, Rexburg, Idaho).

*Candidate - Hare (Continued from page 15)*

Pacific Planetarium Association  
(PPA), member since 1998  
Southwestern Planetarium Association  
(SWAP), member since 2002

#### *Professional recognitions:*

IPS Fellow, 1986-present  
IPS Service Award, 2000  
SEPA Paul Campbell Fellowship  
Award, 2001  
GLPA Armand Spitz Lecturer, 1996  
GLPA Fellow, 2003-present

I would be honored to continue as IPS Council Representative for SEPA. Thanks for your consideration!

# News From SEPA Region

## FLORIDA

contact: George Fleenor  
GeoGraphics Imaging and  
Consulting, Bradenton, FL  
Jetson1959@aol.com



### Florida Planetarium Association (FLORPLAN)

Contact George Fleenor for details.

### Buehler Planetarium Broward College Davie, FL

Susan J. Barnett reports: The Buehler Planetarium & Observatory is running public shows four days a week. The weekend shows and monthly specials include *Stars of Jade*, *The New Cosmos*, *African Skylore*, *Teddy's Quest* and *Women Hold Up Half the Sky*.

We continue to rotate shows on Wednesdays, and these shows include *The People*, *The Mars Show*, *The Voyager Encounters*, *Dawn of Astronomy*, *A Dozen Universes* and *Astrology: Fact or Fiction*.

The Buehler Observatory has viewing four times a week. It has free public observing Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday evenings. In addition, we observe the Sun on Wednesday afternoons. We usually have one telescope set up to view sunspots, and watch flares through a Hydrogen-Alpha filter on another.

### The Bryan-Gooding Planetarium / Alexander Brest Planetarium Jacksonville Museum of Science and History Jacksonville, FL

Thomas Webber reports: Everyone at the Bryan-Gooding Planetarium is looking forward to 2012, including December 21st!

We will be beginning the year by introducing the program "Dynamic Earth" to our rotation. This premier is part of a partnership we are forming with a local TV station that will include periodic weather reports being broadcast from the museum as well as the installation of a meteorological station. This relationship is part of our community outreach strategy.

In our effort to parallel and complement exhibits that are brought into the museum, we are considering several dinosaur shows to run this summer when we will be hosting "A T-Rex Named Sue." We are very excited to be a part of this exhibit's journey and are looking forward.

Our Sci-Fi Day plans for June are coming along, and we are expecting a terrific turnout. Our goal is to celebrate and acknowledge the role science fiction has played in society and how it has influenced and motivated many to study science and engineering. There will be Storm Troopers, droids, Starfleet officers, a Tardis, authors and guest speakers. From early stories of Gilgamesh to H.G. Wells, Gene Roddenberry, George Lucas and James Cameron, it will be a "fascinating" day (get it?).

Of course, the one event that looms over everything we do is SEPA 2013. Negotiations with the Crowne Plaza Hotel are almost complete and I am eager to start work on the next phase of the organizational process. Assuming we survive the end of the world in December, SEPA 2013 in Jacksonville will be fun, productive and outstanding!

In other news, I will resume writing my science column, now for the Florida Times-Union. The goal is to both educate and entertain while addressing topics in astronomy, physics, general science and the space program. I feel the latter is of most importance in the state that acts as the center for manned

space exploration.

All this being said, however, I think we can all agree that there is one spectacular and unprecedented event that recently happened that many of us are still recovering from. It is something we all dreamed and speculated about, yet wondered if it would take place during our lifetimes. Indeed, scientists and philosophers debated for years the likelihood of it ever occurring at all, and what the interpretations and implications of said phenomenon would be were it to happen. I, truly, feel very fortunate to have even glimpsed the event at all.

As you no doubt have guessed, I am referring to Paul Stearns getting married.

Yes! On January 1st, Paul married the lovely and charming Janet Gatsby at the Griffith Observatory in California before honeymooning in Hawaii. I consider myself fortunate to have known Paul for nearly fifteen years and consider him a dear friend. And when I met Janet for the first time two years ago I was overwhelmed by her charm and grace and soon was lucky enough to consider her a friend as well. I think I speak for all of us in SEPA, and indeed the entire planetarium community, when I wish them good luck and happiness. Congratulations Janet and Paul!

From all of us at the Bryan-Gooding Planetarium – Heather, Brett and myself – have a great, productive and non-world-ending 2012!

## GEORGIA

contact: David Dundee  
Tellus Museum  
Cartersville, GA  
DavidD@tellusmuseum.org



### Fernbank Science Center Planetarium Atlanta, GA

April Whitt reports: Fernbank Science Center was fortunate to host an intern for the fall semester.

Amanda Quirk is a junior in a local high school, and has been a wonderful asset to us. She assisted in the observatory, did voice-overs for an upcoming planetarium program, and developed a mini-show about the DAWN mission to Vesta.

Amanda also took care of the NASA Space Place bulletin board, recently installed at the planetarium entrance. NASA sends materials each month for display and distribution to teachers and the public.

In-house productions of the "Star of Wonder" for public audiences and "Snowflake Puzzle" for families were well-attended during December.

New school programming continues, and an exhibit of Fernbank Forest photography by county high school students replaced artistic quilts.

### Planetarium Tellus NW GA Science Museum Cartersville, GA

David Dundee reports: Wow, what a great fall we have had at Tellus. *Attack of the Space Pirates*, and *Forces of Nature* were featured in the planetarium along with *One World One Sky* and our Live tours of the night sky. We had Al Worden, Apollo 15 Astronaut visit and do a program and book signing, we had a moon rock on display for the weekend. We opened a new temporary exhibit from the Smithsonian "Earth from Space." We also hosted our 2nd annual "Heavy Metal in Motion" in October. This is our annual gathering of BIG machines. We had 1902 14 ton tractor, that actually was cranked and worked, a hover craft that glided along our lawn, fire Engines and the Cartersville Tank and more. Plus we had the TIV (Tornado Intercept Vehicle) and Doppler radar truck from the Storm Chasers. We played the 3D storm chasers movie in our big theater. It was a great weekend. Through our affiliation with Smithsonian we have begun to do imaging with the 6 robotic telescopes on Mt. Hopkins in Arizona. Our museum school programs sold out through May by mid-October, and we will wind up with another great attendance year at Tellus.

**Georgia Southern Planetarium  
Georgia Southern University  
Statesboro, GA**

Becky Lowder reports: We've had a very busy fall semester teaching university students daily along with visiting adult and school groups, and giving 3 public evenings for our community. This was also the busiest season with our public outreach with telescopes requested by the regional schools for their science or family reading nights, as well as 1st Fridays Downtown Statesboro. The Statesboro Astronomy Club, a member club of the NASA Night Sky Network, is growing with the new surge and interest in astronomy and space exploration.

In November 2011, I had to say goodbye to my dear old friend as the original Spitz A4 star projector was lifted up and removed from our astronomy laboratory in order to bring us up to the 21st century. She gave us over 40 years of service projecting a beautiful fixed star field on our 30 foot dome, teaching and inspiring hundreds of thousands of students and visitors. The empty pit was sealed and secured with a metal frame and a heavy thick metal plate. Once the carpet squares were glued down it opened up



new available seating and walking space. The interior walls and dome were spray painted in house by Robbie Deal, electronics and research technology manager. He also cut 6 inches off our coves, opening up the sky above the outer edges of seating. Brien Barr, from Bowen Technovation, is installing the new 16 bit LED cove lighting and controls. Colin Conbrink, from Evans and Sutherland, is installing the new Digistar 4 system. The JVC projectors have been placed in 2 special (made on site) metal cabinets on opposite sides of our dome just below the cove. A new smaller control desk is being built as I type. It will be strange not seeing the old Spitz control panels with the broken plastic levers/knobs and metal wood grain finish like the old family station wagons from the 1960's. They're being replaced with a red backlit keyboard and 2 thin computer monitors for the Digistar 4 system.



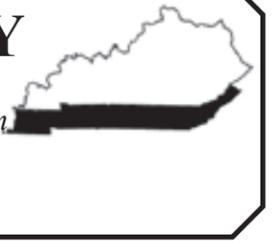
We'll be training on the Digistar 4 tomorrow; I can't wait to see the new sky on our dome! Our university students are extremely excited since we'll be able to use an iPod Touch or Kinect to control the sky and presentation. We will now be able to show all 88 constellations of both hemispheres, opening



up a whole new sky to explore and learn! Before, we only had 2 constellations with overlays on the dome. We will continue giving "live" star shows with hands-on demos, but we can now take our students and visitors off the Earth, through our Solar System, across our Milky Way Galaxy, and out to the edge of the known Universe! Our planetarium intern students will be creating their own shows, and we will be able to teach so much more to our astronomy lab students and visitors. I think that many of the common astronomy misconceptions will be more easily corrected, or never formed, by immersing our students and visitors into the correct concepts, as well as using our hands-on demos. The new semester of teaching with the new planetarium system will begin mid-January 2012. Our first full dome show we'll use for the first public evening in February 2012 will be WONDERS OF THE UNIVERSE from E & S along with a live star show of the current night sky and outdoor telescopic observing. We're all really looking forward to teaching with our new full dome digital system in 2012! Until next time, clear DARK skies!

**KENTUCKY**

contact: Steve Russo  
East Kentucky Planetarium  
Prestonsburg, KY  
srusso0002@kctcs.edu



**East Kentucky Science Center & Planetarium  
Big Sandy Community and Technical College  
Prestonsburg, KY**

Steve Russo reports: Looks like I have been appointed as the state coordinator for Kentucky, so all of you from the Bluegrass State that have information on what you folks are doing in your domes, please send the information on to me. My e-mail address is spres628@yahoo.com

Well I am going to start off my "Kentucky Coordinator" position with news from my own place since that's all I have at the moment. Big changes at the East Kentucky Science Center in Prestonsburg. After having an interim director for two years, the EKSC has a new director. Yours truly took over the director's position in July, after spending 8 years as the Planetarium Manager at the Suits-Bueche Planetarium at the Schenectady Museum in NY. A MAPS and IPS member for 39 years, I have also been a SEPA member since 2006. Coming here with a background in Earth Science and Meteorology, we will be producing new lessons here at the Science Center to expand our programs to the schools and public.

The EKSC is now also a NASA Space Place, and has become part of NISE Net. The NISE Net is a national community of researchers and informal science educators dedicated to fostering public awareness, engagement, and understanding of nanoscale science, engineering, and technology. We will be doing NANO-Days programs in the Spring.

This past Fall the EKSC completed an upgrade to its planetarium. We now have a Spitz SciDome HD projection system to go along with our GOTO Chronos and our AVI SkyLase laser system. A nice combination of equipment in our forty foot dome.

So again a reminder to all the planetarians in Kentucky to send me your happenings in the dome for publication in *Southern Skies*. Please have your info to me by March 19th for the Summer *Southern Skies*.

Thanks, and, "Look to the Skies!!!!!"



**Irene W. Pennington Planetarium  
La. Art & Science Museum  
Baton Rouge, LA**

Jon Elvert reports: Our theater closed for three months beginning 1 August to undergo renovations and reopened 18 November with 171 new Graystone seats, new carpet décor and a few other cosmetic furbishings. As of this writing, we continue to raise funds for projection equipment upgrades. We reopened with *Wild Ocean, Life: A Cosmic Story, One World, One Sky* and our visitor's perennial favorite – *Digital Universe*.

IPS2012 is less than six months away, which also means you should begin thinking about attending SEPA 2012 in Baton Rouge just prior to IPS2012. A reception for SEPA 2012 will be held at the Belle of Baton Rouge Hotel & Casino on Saturday, 21 July followed by paper/workshops on Sunday before the opening reception of IPS2012 Sunday evening. SEPA conference registration is fee. There may be a profession development fund available for you to attend IPS2012, but more info about this will be ready this spring. We hope you're already planning on attending IPS2012 from 22 – 26 July. For current conference updates, go to [www.ips2012.com](http://www.ips2012.com).

**Lafayette Planetarium  
Lafayette Science Museum  
Lafayette, LA**

Dave Hostetter reports: It's been a busy fall in Lafayette! We are preparing to go full dome at the beginning of 2012. Traditional slide-based programs ended at the beginning of December. We spent that month presenting only constellation programs and removing all the dissolves, all-skies and similar projectors. Ash Enterprises will remove the Spitz A4 during the first week in January, and that will be followed by removal of the seats for refurbishment. The planetarium carpeting will be changed, the seats will go back in, and new seats will be added to bring our available seating up to 80. The full dome projectors, systems, and production suite will be installed by Sky-Skan, and we will be open in April, just in time to tell audiences about the transit of Venus. I can't even imagine how steep the learning curve is going to be, but I can't wait to find out! Preliminary plans are being made to place the Spitz A4 on exhibit in the Museum, but there is no set schedule for that yet.

A great dinosaur exhibit from the American Museum of Natural History has helped our attendance in both school and public programs. Our sidewalk astronomy events have been successful as well, with over 1000 people looking through our telescopes in just two months.



**Planetarium  
Elizabeth City State University  
Elizabeth City, NC**

Woodrow Grizzle reports: The past quarter was an exciting one at Elizabeth City State University (ECSU) Planetarium: filled with new partnerships and programming.

November saw our inaugural collaboration with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in this year's Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival. Wings Over Water is primarily a birding festival, but included are many diverse programs that focus on all aspects of nature, from waterways, to geology, and, of course, the night sky. This year, I guided live tours of the real night sky to guests attending the festival from across the continent. Two programs were offered at the Lost Colony Amphitheater in Manteo, North Carolina. Clouds demanded the cancellation of the first program, but the second saw clear skies and good attendance, despite the cold. A third program was a unique tour of both the Alligator River and the evening twilight skies, all aboard a canoe flotilla. Wings Over Water granted us exposure to a new audience, and its success guaranteed an invitation to participate next year.

We are hard at work also on a special presentation as part of the North Carolina Science Festival to take place in April 2012. ECSU and Morehead Planetarium & Science Center have partnered to bring Morehead's *Science 360: The Truth Behind 2012* show to ECSU Planetarium on Friday, April 13, 2012. The show presents the Mayan calendar, looks at the phenomenon of December 21, 2012 with objective exploration of many the popular proposed avenues of destruction, such as collision with a killer giant planet, planetary alignments, and alignment with the galactic core. We hope that the auspices of having such a program on Friday the 13th will help to guarantee a full house. Details can be found at <http://www.ncsciencefestival.org/event/truth-behind-2012/>.

There is also now a telescope in our collection; an 8-inch Meade LX-200 ACF GPS now lives at ECSU. Huzzah! I spent a lot of time researching telescopes and making comparisons: trying to fit the best features into the budget. The LX-200 was not my first choice, however it turned out being the best scope available in our price range for use with the public, astrophotography, aperture, and general ease of use. Ideally, I would have preferred an ASTRO-PHYSICS 305mm F3.8 Riccardi-Honders Astrograph, mated to Software Bisque's new Paramount MX: but who would not.

The Venus Transit is coming up on June 6, 2012, and I am hard at work preparing an action plan for a hypothetical observation event to take place that evening. The timing of the event is amazing, being from 18:00 EDT to sunset. Folks will have time to get home, wash behind their ears, grab a bite, and come watch an incredibly rare and historic astronomical event. Because of the timing, we expect to draw large crowds. We only have one telescope and one person (me) to man it, so there are a few (!) remaining logistical challenges. All will be well, though.

On a side note: if anyone has any ideas of a topic they would like to see covered in my archaeoastronomy feature piece, please do not hesitate to drop me a line. My contact info can be found inside the front cover of this very journal. Many thanks, happy New Year, and happy transiting.

**Robeson Planetarium and Science Center  
Public Schools of Robeson County  
Lumberton, NC**

Ken Brandt reports: We continue on into the second half of the school year, largely for 3rd and 6th grade audiences. The Third Graders are seeing a program called *Skytellers: The Battle for Winter and Spring*. This was a part of a free package from the Lunar and Planetary Lab, which includes educational activities. It features twelve Native American legends of sky lore, as told by native storytellers. We finish the 3rd grade experience with a kinesthetic astronomy activity.

Our Sixth graders will be learning about *Natural Selection*, a program produced by Mirage3D. It explores the diversity of life on Earth, the complexity of the life and times of Charles Darwin, and is directly aligned with the common core standards for Sixth Grade Science. As one example-did you know that Darwin was a sharpshooter?

Our next project: compiling snippets of *the Sagan Series* into a fulldome-adapted program. Dr. Sagan still speaks to us powerfully, almost 15 years after his passing.

We are also competing for an NSF informal educa-

tion grant-to render the Robeson Planetarium and Science Center energy neutral, begin high school and middle school 'green jobs' exposure, and start programs to enhance the education for kids in Robeson County, NC.

We are also participating as an institutional partner in the 2nd USA Science and Engineering Festival, to be held in Washington D.C. in April. We are also a part of the NC state science festival, being spear-headed by the Morehead Planetarium's staff. As you can guess, it's busy here in Lumberton!

**Margaret C. Woodson Planetarium  
Horizons Unlimited, Rowan-Salisbury Schools  
Salisbury, NC**

Patsy Wilson reports: The flexibility of our staff continues. I've been spending lots of time teaching "Sound Makers" to 2nd graders. We bought a state of the art Theremin after I returned with excitement from Jon Bell's workshop at the 2010 conference and the kids love it!! We spent the week after Thanksgiving decorating 16 Christmas trees for our annual exhibit. They are decorated to show products, natural resources, sports teams, etc from various states across the U.S. The first weekend in December, I donned a period costume, portrayed a schoolmarm in our authentic one-room log school from the early 1800s and talked about Christmas customs of the time. This was a partnership with the local Symphony Guild

We shared AVI's **Laser Holidays** with lots of audience during December. In January, our public show will feature the beautiful winter sky and its interesting constellations. February's show is an old favorite, **More Than Meets The Eye**.

We will also participate in the NC Science Festival during our regular April public opening. The audience will enjoy a planetarium show, receive a monthly star map and have an opportunity to participate in a hands-on astronomy activity following the show.

We have acquired a set of ActivExpressions, an audience response device, which will be used for seating show quizzes (My version of Becky Lowder's

seating show idea from a previous conference.) I'm also incorporating them into my 4th and 6th grade programs.

**TENNESSEE**

contact: Kris McCall  
Sudekum Planetarium  
Nashville, TN  
krismccall@adventuresci.com

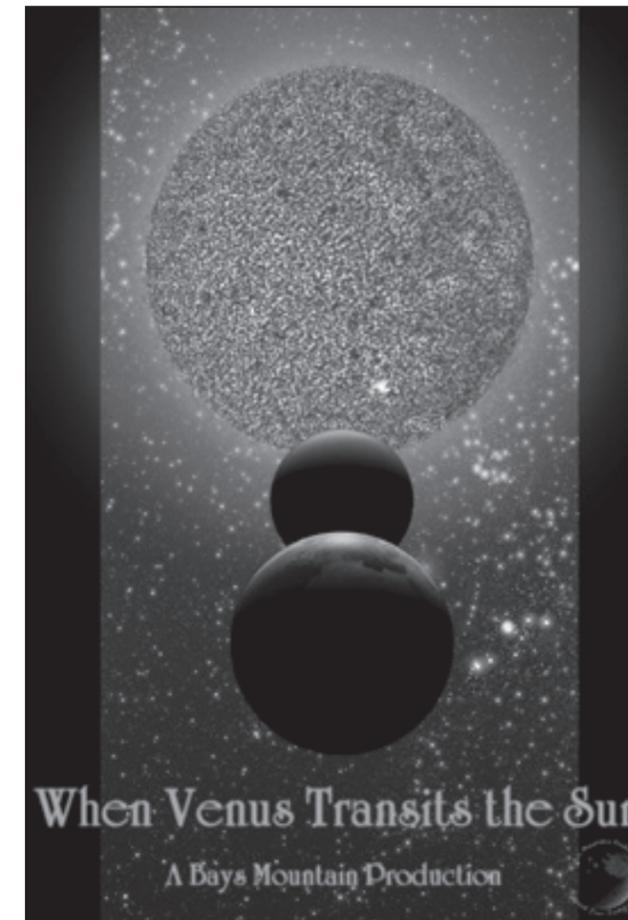


**Bays Mountain Planetarium  
Kingsport, TN**

Adam Thanz reports: Show production. It takes a major amount of our time to produce full-dome shows. Five months was spent in transforming our classic-format "The Case of the Disappearing Planet" program into its new, full-dome format. All the art had to be reprocessed, separated into individual components, laid out in 3-D space, and animated. There were also about 40+ major scenes that had to be created from scratch to animate within. Unfortunately, it is not easy nor quick to do. But, the final results are well worth the effort. "The Case of the Disappearing Planet" is currently our main feature for our theater and ready for distribution to yours.

We are now working on a brand-new full-dome show entitled "When Venus Transits the Sun." I bet you can guess what it's about! We wanted to make a really good, but simple show about the upcoming celestial event. If you are in the United States, the transit will be June 5, 2012. We think the event will garner lots of public interest. As such, by the time you read this, you should be able to receive a copy of this full-dome show for an extremely low cost. Our Park Association wanted to share this program and keep the cost way down so all planetaria could benefit. The show mixes some live interactivity with the audience and gets them involved in the exploration. It will be great for all who attend. Just contact us for more info.

Our new alternate show for our theater is "Appalachian Skies - Winter." A live show from Jason Dorfman that takes visitors on a tour of the winter sky and uses cool visuals to enhance the program. Even though it is live, there are many weeks spent on its programming. As always, it will be a really great show. It will run during Jan. & Feb.



*The show poster for "When Venus Transits the Sun" showing a stylistic view of the main characters of the upcoming Venus Transit.*

**Akima Planetarium  
East Tennessee Discovery Center  
Knoxville, TN**

Charles Ferguson reports:

Happy Winter Solstice! I really don't have much to report. I am still doing live astronomy presentation in the Akima Planetarium and forced to take Star-Lab out to schools. This is absolutely wearing my

car out! I am not doing anything more dynamic than a plain "Star Talk" in the planetarium. The visitors seem to appreciate what they learn as they thank me for their planetarium experience on the way out and say they had learned so much about the night sky during the visit. But, I DO have over 173,000 miles on my six year old Prius! That is nearly 30,000 miles per year with most of it being StarLab.

**Sharpe Planetarium  
Memphis, TN**

Dave Maness reports: Dave Maness reports: The year sure has gone by quickly. After a busy summer, we kicked off the autumn with the annual Friends of the Pink Palace Crafts Fair in October. This 4-day event features about a hundred vendors of fine crafts and art. There is also a stage with musical groups and performers. There I set up my "circus" tent and astronomy display. This year I added a new human sundial that folks seemed to enjoy.



On the weekend after that, I again set up the solar telescope in front of the Campus Holiday Inn to help supplement the educational value of the local Science Fiction/Comic Convention. Many students



came in busloads to safely observe the sun and attend a special program about the production process for comics, movies, and computer games.

No, I don't drive with the banner on the car.

October and November brought busloads of school groups to the Pink Palace Museum and Sharpe Planetarium. For the public we offered *Dark Matters* from Maryland Science Center. That was replaced by the return of *Star of Wonder* written by Jon U. Bell. Soon that program will step aside for *Worlds in Motion* from the Sudekum Planetarium. We are also running a seasonal favorite produced here called *Wonders of a Winter Night* a program that is jam packed with history, constellations, and sky lore. If all goes as planned, by this time next year we should be getting ready for some needed renovations and upgrades.

I hope everyone is doing well and wish you all a happy and prosperous New Year.

## VIRGINIA

contact: Kelly Herbst  
Virginia Living Museum  
Newport News, VA  
Kelly.Herbst@thevlm.org



### John C. Wells Planetarium James Madison University Harrisonburg, VA

Shanil Virani reports: The biggest news here at the John C. Wells Planetarium is the fact we have a new Director (me) and that you can now find us online (<http://www.jmu.edu/planetarium>), on twitter ([jmuplanetarium](http://twitter.com/jmuplanetarium)) and on facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/jmu.planetarium>). We are also now officially a NASA Space Place! As for content, we just recently presented "Mystery of the Christmas Star," followed by a live star talk of the Harrisonburg night sky, and were overwhelmed by the turnout!

### Abbitt Planetarium Virginia Living Museum Newport News

Kelly Herbst reports: Did anyone else enjoy International Observe the Moon Night as much as we did on October 8th? We had about 1000 people come by to tour NASA's Driven to Explore trailer and touch an actual piece of the Moon! Games, activities, crafts, planetarium shows, laser shows, and of course, actual Moon observing rounded out an amazing event! We're looking forward to next October already!

By the time you read this, we will be well into the running of several new shows for the New Year, as well as a couple of returning favorites. The Cassini mission program *Saturn: The RingWorld* will be our go-to space science show for 2012, and my cohort John has just completed a fabulous look at the numerous fraudulent end-of-the-world claims in our new show *2012: The End of the World? NOT!* We'll be running that show all year, as I expect things will get crazier as 2012 rolls onward. John did a fabulous job on the show...it is engaging, informative, and just enough tongue-in-cheek to keep the show amusing and fun without mocking the true-believing crowd too much. And talk about research – John went so far as to learn to read ancient Sumerian to make sure he got the facts right! It's a great show, and I can't wait to see how it's received. We'll also be bringing back *Kaluoka'hina* for the preschool crowd – a perennial favorite (everyone loves happy fish!), and of course, *Virginia Skies*, our live program, rounds out the offerings.

The New Year brings many wonderful winter events back to the museum, as well as a few new ones. On January 12th we'll be hosting Family Fun Night at the Grissom Library in Newport News as part of their exhibition of Visions of the Universe. I get to be the astronomer for Stump the Astronomer! I can't wait to see what questions the kids bring me. February 2nd is Groundhog Day, of course, and the museum will once again host its popular Groundhog Night event, complete with live groundhog and our classic planetarium show *Assignment: Earth* which stars a woodchuck as well (Go SEPA!). February will also see the return of *Follow the Drinking Gourd: A Quest for Freedom* to the planetarium in

celebration of Black History Month. The show has a loyal following, and we're always glad to offer it during February. On February 11, the museum opens its winter exhibit Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl, which is sure to be a hit with the kids. To accompany the exhibit, the planetarium will be featuring AVI's laser version of *Legends of the Night Sky: Orion*, which is of course narrated by an owl! It should be a real crowd pleaser. President's Day weekend is Reptile Weekend at the Virginia Living Museum (hmmm...subtle irony there, maybe?) and we'll be once again offering our reptile-themed planetarium game show *A Sky Full of Scales*.

Looking to read more of my ramblings? I now do a blog about astronomy for the museum – check it out at [astronomy-vlm.blogspot.com](http://astronomy-vlm.blogspot.com).

So as you can see, 2012 will be a busy year under our dome! We hope you've recovered from the holidays, and wish you all the best under your dome in 2012!

### Pretlow Planetarium Old Dominion University Norfolk, VA

Declan De Paor reports: Old Dominion University hosted NASA Night on Saturday, Sept. 24, to help promote the space agency's "Driven to Explore" initiative.

The events, which were free and open to the public, included a keynote talk by Ann Martin, a postdoctoral fellow at NASA Langley Research Center, and



a viewing of an Apollo 17 moon rock specimen.

The programs started at 4:30 p.m. in the Oceanography and Physics Building lobby with a reception and a viewing of ODU's OmniGlobe, a spherical display that can take spectators on an interplanetary trip to Jupiter, send them back in time to early Earth or even zip them around the modern-day globe to pinpoint field research being done by faculty and students.

Martin spoke at 5 p.m. in the Mills Godwin Jr. Life Sciences Building auditorium. Following her talk, at 5:40 p.m., visitors viewed the Apollo 17 moon rock, a space shuttle heat tile and meteorite specimens in the Pretlow Planetarium.

Despite the rain (which perhaps kept the city manager, among other expected guests, away) we had a great turnout (estimated at 150 people) for our Physics Department outreach event. It took over an hour for everyone in line to touch the Apollo 17 moon rock specimen that the Johnson Space Center sent to us, but folks were in good spirits throughout and eager to ask questions about the cosmos whilst waiting. Guest speaker Dr Ann Martin from NASA Langley was impressed by our innovative use of technology that enabled the audience to text or tweet questions to her using their own cellphones. I use this technology in my undergraduate class to great effect - farewell clickers!



**Thomas Jefferson HS Planetarium  
Richmond, VA**

Leslie Bochenski reports: It's been a busy fall, with programs on Moon phases for grade 3 and the rotation of the Earth for grade 1. From October 3 to December 5, 650 students have visited the Planetarium, along with 70 teachers and chaperones. I've received quite a few compliments from teachers on my programs.

Eric Melenbrink from ASH Enterprises will be here on December 15 to perform routine maintenance and install a pair of much needed new speakers for the sound system. The old Radio Shack speakers are long overdue for the trash heap!

I'm looking forward to two weeks off for Winter Break, and then starting the New Year off with a program on the reason for the seasons for 4th grade students. Happy Winter Solstice everyone!



## **REMEMBER YOUR STATE COORDINATOR!**

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An advertisement for Digistar. The background is a vibrant, colorful nebula or galaxy. In the center, an Xbox 360 Kinect sensor is shown from a top-down perspective. The text 'Can Your Planetarium Do This?' is at the top in white. Below the Kinect, the text 'Controller-free interface Just one of many amazing new features' is displayed. At the bottom right, there is a QR code with the text 'Check it out!' above it. In the bottom left corner, there are logos for Evans &amp; Sutherland (E&amp;S), Facebook, and Twitter, along with the text 'EVANS &amp; SUTHERLAND Digital Theater www.es.com'. In the bottom right corner, the Digistar logo is shown with the tagline 'A Universe of Possibilities'.

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