

Southern Skies

Volume 38, Number 1 Journal of the Southeastern Planetarium Association Winter 2018



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Mel Blake
Department of Physics and Earth Science
University of north Alabama
Florence, Alabama



2017 was quite a year for most of us, with lots of new programs, new tech, and of course the Great American Eclipse. We are all now mostly recovered from what was arguably one of the most successful, but frantic, years for our planetariums. It was certainly a year I will remember for a long time. However, it was not great for all of us, with the series of hurricanes wreaking havoc on program schedules, and in some cases damaging facilities and homes. Our colleagues in Florida and Puerto Rico are still recovering and SEPA members should all stand at the ready to help in any way we can to get their facilities operational and educating the next generation of scientists.

At Southern Skies we are looking to the future and the past. Thanks to David Hoffstetter we have some past issues of the Southern Skies that we will be scanning in and getting up on the website. We have also gone digital, with the paper issues no longer being printed. It is hoped that this transition will be welcomed by the membership and it will allow better presentation of photos and ads which will now be in color. Our ad rates will be adjusted due to this, so advertisers

stay tuned. The change will also save a considerable amount of money each year, which can be put to other uses for SEPA.

Another project which we are working on at Southern Skies is to get the journal indexed. This seems a little idiosyncratic, but it will improve the reach of the papers published in the journal. An indexed journal is searchable by various search engines that look for scholarly articles. It also means that the so-called impact factor is calculated for articles and the articles you publish in Southern Skies can be counted as publications on your CV. This helps the authors, and will hopefully encourage people to write articles for Southern Skies. We will likely decide on an embargo period when only members can access the issues, and then make older issues available after this proprietary period.

Finally, the last couple issues have been fairly late in arriving. To tighten up the schedule we will begin to be more strict about articles arriving on time for inclusion in the upcoming issues. I may have to tell you that I will include your article in a following edition in order to get things running on a proper schedule.

Best wishes for a great 2018!

Mel Blake

Submit your Articles!

Do you have a great activity to engage your audiences? Have you devised a cool gadget or do-it-yourself upgrade that you would like to share? SEPA would love to hear about it and share your knowledge.

We can receive electronic files in most any format. Graphics can be received electronically or in hard-copy, 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).



John Hare
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IPS 2018

By the time you read this, you should already have your plans in place for this year's IPS conference in Toulouse, France. Conference dates are July 1st to July 5th. Late registration should still be available.

IPS 2020

Mark your calendar! The Tellus World of Science in Edmonton, Canada will host the 2020 IPS conference. Conference dates are June 21 to June 25. This will mark the 50th anniversary of IPS! SEPA officers and prospective SEPA conference hosts, please note the June dates and plan accordingly.

IPS 2022

Invitations for the 2022 IPS conference site will be presented at this year's IPS Council meeting.

Vision 2020

Vision 2020 is an ongoing initiative of IPS. Its basic purpose is to implement changes to IPS that will allow the organization to grow and better serve the international planetarium community. The first day of this year's IPS Council meeting will be devoted to a workshop for this initiative.

2023, 100th anniversary of the planetarium

The following is reprinted from the December 2017 issue of *The Planetarian*. It was written by Björn Voss, Planetarium Münster, Germany, Society of German-Speaking Planetariums:

The first public presentation in a planetarium setting took place in 1923. The 100th anniversary of this event—the Planetarium Centennial—will be a huge opportunity for all of us, not just to celebrate our history, but to present what we have become

and to highlight what we plan to achieve in the future. The centennial should serve to globally showcase what planetariums nowadays offer to their patrons and to society as a whole.

The centennial should serve to globally showcase what planetariums nowadays offer to their patrons and to society as a whole.

With this in mind, members of the IPS Council agreed during their last session that the centennial should be held as a year-long, global series of events and activities. Although the celebration is still six years ahead, the time to start planning is now. Thus, a new working group to prepare for the anniversary was formed, and I am the lucky volunteer to coordinate this group. Our first step of the preparations, right now, is to collect ideas and feedback.

While there are already many ideas in place, many more are needed. We seek all kinds of ideas from everyone in the community: planetarium staff, vendors, students, scientists—we ask everyone to provide their thoughts! Which concrete activities would you suggest in order to make the centennial a long-lasting success? What else do you think is relevant to realize the maximum potential of this centennial? Please let your thoughts be known directly to bjornvoss@gdp-planetarium.org or through your affiliate representative.

Visit the newly designed IPS Website for more information about IPS and its many initiatives; www.ips-planetarium.org.

You can obtain IPS membership forms from IPS Treasurer Ann Bragg at ann.bragg@marietta.edu, myself at johnhare@earthlink.net, or at the IPS Website, www.ips-planetarium.org

BOOKENDS

Robin Byrne
Northeast State Community College
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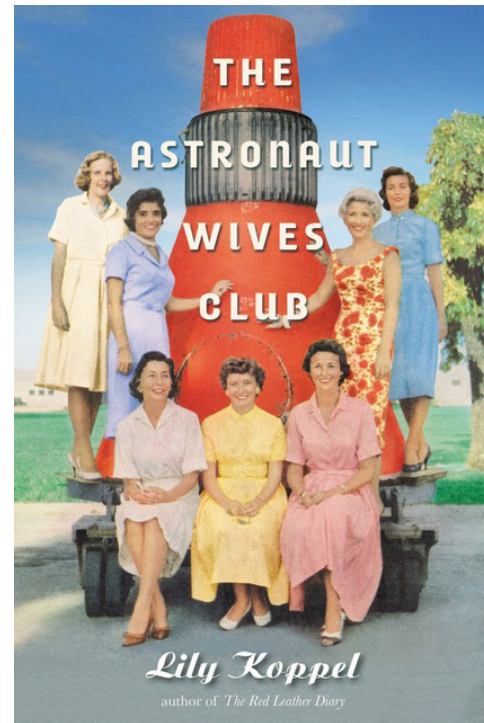
Book Review: The Astronaut Wives Club

With a long commute to and from work, audio books have become one of my favorite ways of staying entertained while driving. My most recent listen was *The Astronaut Wives Club: A True Story* by Lily Koppel. The narration was provided by Orlagh Cassidy.

From the cover, I was led to believe that it was only going to be about the wives of the Mercury astronauts, however, I was wrong. The book attempts to tell the story of the wives of, not only the Mercury astronauts, but also the wives of Gemini and Apollo astronauts. That's a lot of stories to try to tell. Certainly the focus was on the Mercury wives, and easily half of the book is devoted to their stories, with more of a selection of later wives getting a similar amount of attention. That broad scope definitely hurt the book, since you never really got to know much about any one woman. Of the Mercury wives, I had not known that Trudy Cooper was a pilot in her own right, and that Rene Carpenter had become a journalist. Each of those women could easily warrant a book of their own, instead of the cursory treatment they get in this publication.

Lily Koppel seemed more interested in telling the stories in the context of the changing society of the 1960's and the role of women, in particular. She gave much focus on the infidelity of the husbands, portraying the women as martyrs of their time and circumstance, while still managing to be critical of one another. The patriarchal approach from NASA was also on display in how the wives were treated. As more astronauts joined NASA, the Life Magazine contract money was spread thinner and thinner, while the media coverage remained as invasive as ever. Given the stresses put on the marriages from all sides, it's not too surprising that most ended in divorce.

I wondered about the scope of Koppel's research, though, when many portions of the Mercury



though, when many portions of the Mercury era stories were nearly word-for-word identical to scenes from *The Right Stuff*. It was not clear if the author actually interviewed any of the wives or simply relied on other sources.

Adding to my dissatisfaction was the tone of the narrator, Orlagh Cassidy. Throughout the book, her voice made me feel like she approached the telling as though she were dishing the dirt with the girls. This gave the entire book a feel of a gossipy tell-all. I wondered how I would have felt about the book if I had read it, instead, with my own internal voice providing the tone.

For someone who knows anything about the history of the space program, there was nothing new added to the public stories of the various missions. Meanwhile, the stories of the wives deserved something with more depth.

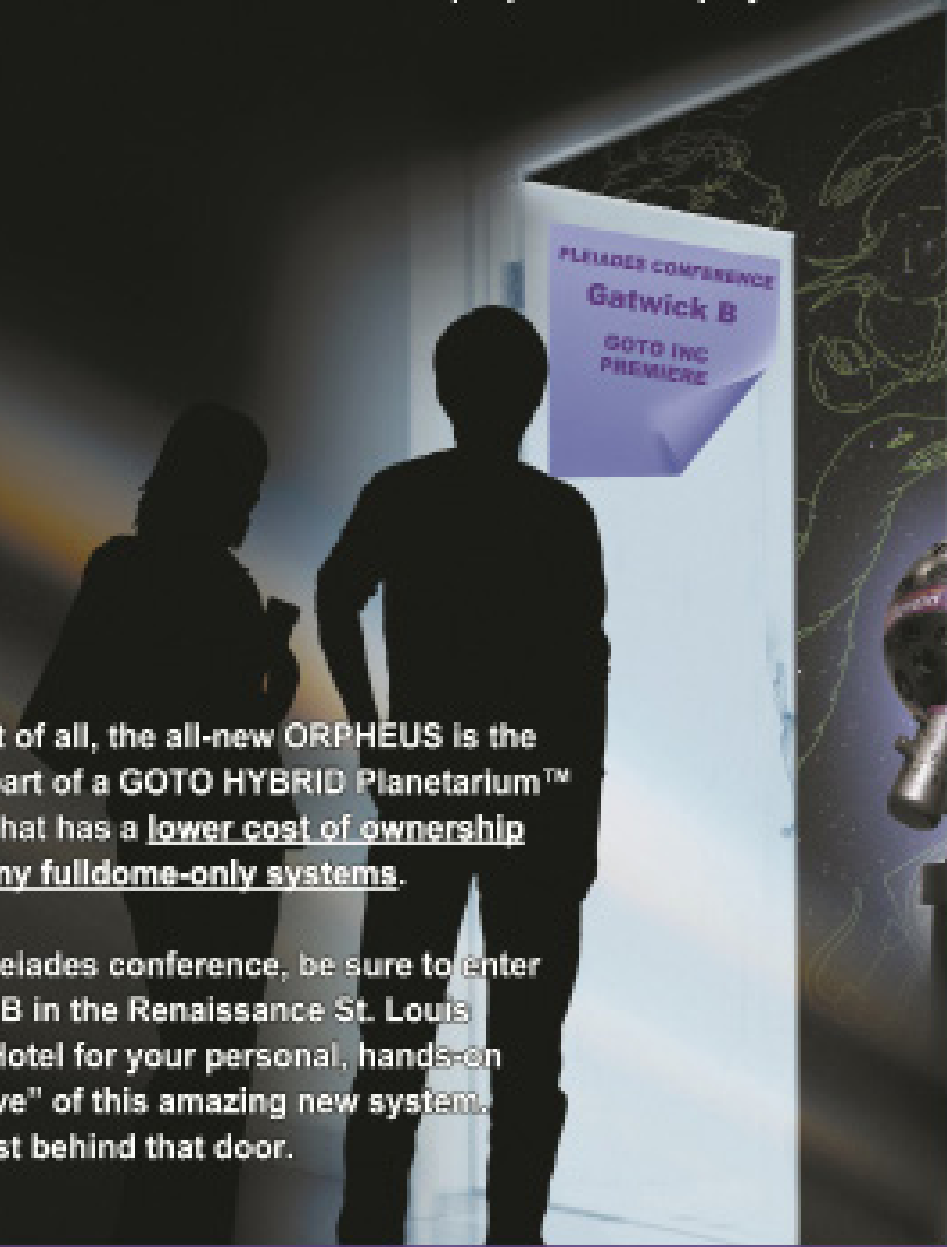
As something to listen to in the car while driving, the book was fine for keeping me distracted. However, if you are looking for actual information about the wives that goes beyond skin-deep,

GOTO

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DIGISTAR 6

continued from page 6

this is most definitely not the book for you.

References:

The Astronaut Wives Club: A True Story by Lily Koppel; 2013, Hachette Audio

Advertise in Southern Skies!

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 back cover, inside back cover or inside front 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.

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: _____

News From the SEPA Region Winter 2018

VIRGINIA

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



Abbitt Planetarium
Virginia Living Museum
Newport News

Kelly Herbst reports: Happy 2018! Here's hoping that we will all have a wonderful year under the dome!

With a lovely perihelic opposition of Mars on tap for this summer, the Abbitt Planetarium will be featuring a new program Journey to Mars. This combination in-house and full dome show will feature the short NASA's Journey to Mars at the end, with a fully in-house produced leader at the front. We're looking forward to some great views of the Red Planet later this year and hoping we can inspire our audiences to get out there and view it as well! As always, we'll also have a kid-friendly show – in this case, the laser version of Legends of the Night Sky: Perseus and Andromeda – and our classic live program, Virginia Skies. In February we will bring back Follow the Drinking Gourd: A Quest for Freedom to celebrate Black History Month. We'll also be featuring a special exhibit on coral reefs, and so the planetarium will feature the ever-popular Kaluoka'hina: The Enchanted Reef during its run. On St. Patrick's Day weekend, the museum does indeed go green ...the green

of reptile scales! Our hugely popular Reptile Weekend will see the planetarium featuring A Sky Full of Scales (our live quiz show about reptiles) and Noisy Neighbors: A Frog Story (about the danger amphibians currently face in the wild).

Wintertime skies mean cold, and hopefully clear, nights and delightfully early sunsets. Our monthly star parties are always well attended, but they are best at this time of year when the sky is dark early. We'll be enjoying the winter nights – hope you do too!

Have a wonderful Winter season!

Any Virginia planetarian with news to share with SEPA should contact Kelly Herbst at kelly.herbst@thevlm.org or 757-595-1900 ext. 256

Radford University Planetarium
Radford University
Norfolk

Rhett Herman reports: It's a bit late, but I saw that I never sent in something about our big Eclipse Celebration back in August. Here's the story...

I had received a number of video clips from Rice University's Space Science Institute (<http://space.rice.edu/eclipse/>) and Pat Reiff, a scientist and outreach supporter without peer! I had collected those into a 20-minute show that we called "Eclipse 2017." I showed that to a number of visiting groups throughout the summer, with the majority of the groups being K-12 summer enrichment groups. We also had received a nice space- and eclipse-education kit from the NISEnet people that had a number of hands-on activities for the kids.

I set up an August 21 event with a number of local partners including the Radford City Public Library, the Blacksburg Children's Museum, Christiansburg Wine and Design, Radford City Public Schools, and Radford University's own Museum of the Earth Sciences (located adjacent to the planetarium). We also had a number of Radford University student and staff volunteers

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for this day. I had set up the NISEnet activities for those to staff, along with the setups that some of these groups brought with them. I had set “Eclipse 2017” planetarium shows to run repeatedly throughout the day. I had about 1,200 pairs of eclipse viewing shades from the NISEnet kit and other groups to give away, and I had set up a nice 8-inch telescope with a solar filter to view the sun throughout the day.



Terri Norton Welch of Christiansburg Wine and Design leads the first of 4 eclipse-themed painting workshops early in the morning of August 21, before the big rush of people hit. Photo credit: Rhett Herman.



A photo of one of Terri’s proud classes of new artists. In 60 minutes she instructed them on how to go from their completely blank canvases to these amazing eclipse paintings. Photo Credit: Terri Norton Welch.

I had also arranged for live video conferencing with a solar research team that we were sending to Nashville to be in the path of totality. This group had received a solar telescope setup from the National Solar Observatory to join in the Citizen CATE (Continental American Telescopic Eclipse) study of the eclipse. They were one of about 80 teams with this setup, and one of about 65 of those teams to have clear skies that day. We interspersed short videoconferences with the every-hour “Eclipse 2017” shows, with one long video conference leading up to and right at the Nashville totality. We saw their totality 11 minutes before our upcoming 92%, and thus got the best of both worlds. (It was also fun explaining how this 11-minute time difference for the local maxima variations happened.)



The unexpectedly-large number of visitors in the Center for the Sciences, just outside of the planetarium. We gave away thousands of NASA posters and lithographs, had many hand-on activities, had tours of the Museum of the Earth Sciences, had kids made and eat “solar cookies” and in general had a big eclipse party! Photo credit Rhett Herman.

I was nervous about all of this in that I was hoping for at least a few hundred people to show up to make all of this setup worthwhile. It turns out that my nervousness was actually pointed in the wrong direction. In the end we estimate that approximately 1,500 people showed up at various times throughout the day for this big event! It was amazing! Not only did this huge crowd show, but we also had 2 TV stations and 3 newspapers come by for stories. I also found out that a number of “surprise” out-of-town visitors came by including a couple driving from Florida to New York who heard about us on the radio, and decided to “just stop by” for a visit! It was just one amazing thing after another.



This youngster got a great view of the eclipse through the telescope with the solar filter. Photo by the Southwest Times.

Oh...maybe I should also add some other numbers. It turns out that we set a record for the Radford University Planetarium this year in terms of number of visitors and number of individual shows run. We had a total of 7,320 visitors and ran a total of 286 separate shows, both records for a calendar year (or any other 12-month stretch).

<http://www.radford.edu/planetarium/>
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 (540) 831-6443 (dept.)
 (540) 831-6615 (fax)
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Photo Credit Radford University/Lora Gordon.



Even the reporter from WDBJ7 took a break to check out the eclipse! Photo credit Radford University/Lora Gordon.

WHERE
 RU Center for the Sciences – Planetarium
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 Parking in Lot E across University Drive Bridge

WHEN
 August 21, 2017
 10:00am-5:00pm
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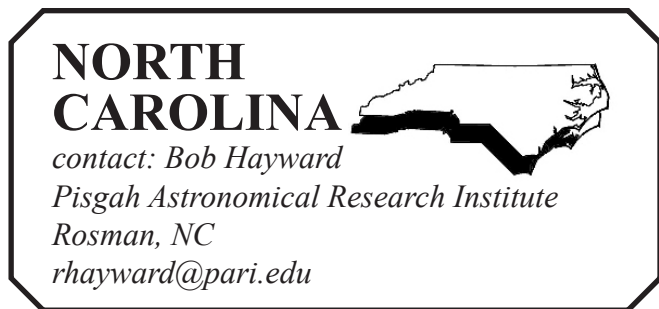
Enjoy hands-on fun activities courtesy of the Children's Museum of Blacksburg, the Radford City Public Library, and the RU Physics Department

Be part of a nation-wide eclipse tracking program!

*while supplies last



The planetarium audience was videoconferencing with our research group in Nashville. RU Physics alumnae, long-time high school science teacher, and current VT PhD (education) student Jennifer Maguire is on the screen showing us what was happening in Nashville just before the totality. Photo credit Radford University/Lora Gordon.



**Horizons Unlimited, Margaret C. Woodson
Planetarium Salisbury, NC**

Neil Pifer reports: The holiday season is here and we are excited to celebrate with many planetarium star talks and laser shows. Our attendance is steadily increasing for all year round and the holidays represent full show. This year we are auctioning off fully decorated Christmas trees for summer camp scholarships. This fundraiser allows us to partner with many different schools across our district and increase foot traffic in our facility and in the planetarium. Win win! Happy holidays and we here at Horizons Unlimited wish all of you a safe and happy new year.

**Robeson Planetarium
Lumberton, NC**

Ken Brandt reports: Robeson Planetarium update: My district and administration have been very supportive of the inflatable version of the planetarium. Before the flooding associated with Hurricane Matthew, we had a driver on staff, and a bus assigned exclusively for our use. The driver retired, and the bus was ruined by the water. Even so, individual schools have agreed to use their bus and a driver from their staff: result, we've seen almost 3,000 students so far! Most teachers are pleasantly surprised about the quality of the program, and the resilience we have shown. One student exclaimed; "are we actually going to fit in there?" My response-if I can fit in there, you can too. Mischievous managed :) I tend to forget too often the simple joy to be found in the exclamations of wonder in kids-and adults by the wonder to be found in the planetarium environment.

We have organized an advisory board, in order to generate community support and assist in fundrais

ing, should that be necessary. However, the school system is moving quickly toward building a new school and central office-not a planetarium/science center. I am advocating for the inclusion of the planetarium/science center in one of the two larger structures. We'll see how that turns out, but I remain hopefully skeptical. I end this update with a simple thank you to the Robeson County Partnership for Children, which has opened up their multipurpose room for the inflatable to be set up on a "semi-permanent" basis.

**Pisgah Astronomical Research Institute
Rosman, NC**

Lebby Moran reports: October was a busy month for PARI's staff with a trip to St. Louis for the Pleiades Conference to share preliminary results from radio observations during the 2017 total solar eclipse. This was followed closely by NCSTA in Greensboro; the Education department returned to PARI late the night before needing to help put on a very successful first Halloween event for PARI. The first annual Frightful Friendfest saw over a hundred people joining in the celebration with storytelling, star gazing, and a very well received "haunted house" hosted right in the basement floor of the main building and modeled after a gruesome alien escape. The last large event for 2017 was Homecoming mid-November, a night to thank our donors and volunteers for all they do for PARI. It was celebrated with a fantastic dinner in the newly finished restaurant on campus, Smiley's, and star gazing afterwards. The Education department will be kicking off 2018 with Astronomy Days at the end of January, the Western Regional Science Fair in February, and the Atlanta Science Festival through March, as well as continuing with the successful monthly collaboration with the local 4-H Club to offer SciGirls activities that will continue through the year.

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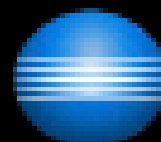
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ALABAMA

contact: Mitzi Adams

Wernher von Braun Planetarium

Huntsville, AL

mitzi.adams@nasa.gov



University of North Alabama Planetarium, University of North Alabama, Florence, Alabama

Mel Blake reports: The fall was a busy one for us after the crazy summer of the eclipse. We participated in the International Observe the Moon Night, which is one of our annual fall events. Planetarium volunteer Anna Hill and Mel Blake also attended the Pleiades conference in St. Louis. This was Anna's first professional conference and she had also never been to Missouri before. It was great to catch up with the planetarium community and see the new tech and ideas for programs. I particularly enjoyed catching up with my friends at PARI in North Carolina. They are doing great work there.

One idea that I got at the conference was for a program on the stars and constellations mentioned in the Harry Potter novels. I had never read them, but I have friends who are fanatics. I am trying to do

one special event each month. The idea is to do things which will bring repeat visitors, and we are still having a bit of a bump in attendance due to the eclipse which raised our profile locally. In October we decorate the planetarium for Halloween and I do my Dooms Day Lecture, and we give out candy. In December we do the traditional Christmas Star shows. November is a little sparse for ideas. The Harry Potter themed program fits right in, since it really can be done anytime. The problem was I had never read the novels, and while some websites give information, I ended up reading the series. This was a major undertaking, and my friends kept asking me how I justified reading children's books and calling it "work". I kept a notebook for the astronomy references and then using my star chart software I created a star map with the constellations and stars mentioned in the program. I created the usual power point lecture. On the night of the event about 45 people showed up, which is good for us since we only hold 60! We had a costume contest and gave away Galileoscopes. It was well received and since then I have had people who missed it ask when we will do it again.

Our December Christmas Star programs were probably our most successful in years. We show the Evans and Southernland show "Mystery of the Christmas Star", followed by a discussion of the

COMING 2018

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constellations. We decorate for the season and have free candy canes. The adults take more candy canes than the kids. Our communications office has started helping with publicity, and they are much better at advertising than I am, and have a bigger budget. We had 270 people over five nights, which is almost our capacity. Overall the fall was very successful.



We got a button maker and have started making our own buttons. Here we see our give aways for Observe the Moon Night. The buttons are very popular.



My assistant Stacy Verros dressed up for our Halloween "Doomsday Lecture".



Our planetarium volunteer Anna Hill stands in front of the science center at the Pleiades conference. It was her first planetarium conference.



Old and new friends. Ken Yager, Christi Whitworth, Lebbly Moran, Anna Hill and me. (L - R).



A highlight of the Pleiades conference was the panel of NASA engineers who helped build NASA's Mercury, Gemini and Apollo spacecraft.



Lafayette Science Museum
Lafayette, LA

Dave Hostetter reports: Like everyone else, the Lafayette planetarium staff spent September recovering from the eclipse. Questions about eclipse glasses have finally stopped! We participated in the recycling program in conjunction with Astronomers without Borders, but recovered surprisingly few glasses.

Although we have advertised in various forms for many years, this fall we started listing every individual public program as an “event” on Facebook. Numbers aren’t final yet, but it certainly looks as if we had a noticeable increase in attendance once we started doing that as well as an increase in visitors coming for a specific program instead of simply coming to whatever program was scheduled while they were here. For some reason, Stars of the Pharaohs in particular caught people’s interest and attendance for that certainly jumped once it was listed as a Facebook event.

We are hoping for a busy March this year with Sun-Earth Day coinciding with a Mini Makers Faire at the museum. We’re also looking forward to a pair of big events called The Universe in Music, to be done in conjunction with Jonn Serrie.

St. Charles Parish Library
Luling, LA

Jason Talley reports: 2017 ended on a down note for our small planetarium. Our Planetarium Assistant of the past few years, Sabra Wilson, moved onto greener pastures, and attendance remained subdued. However, attendance for the year was strong, and we have more events planned for 2018.

While the attendance slowed with the changing season, the planetarium saw a 13% yearly growth in attendance over our last full year of operations prior to renovations, 2015. I hope to continue this growth into 2018 as more school groups return to our dome.

Our renovation contractors are still visiting from time to time. Our cove is still slightly sagging but is now properly supported. Sadly after these repairs, the adjacent section of ceiling tiles and grid collapsed. Our contractors promptly returned again to correct that issue. On a good note, our air conditioning system is running much more smoothly and no longer allows the planetarium’s humidity levels to rise above 70%, which is progress.

Our Lovecraft Halloween event was well attended by local teenagers. A few teens even complimented my dramatic reading of “The Statement of Randolph Carter,” saying that every pause left them on the edge of their seats. Our library staff and I are looking forward to another Lovecraft theme event next year.

The planetarium has also started planning a Yuri’s Night event for this April. NISE Network again selected our planetarium to receive one of their 2018 Earth & Space Toolkits. The 2017 toolkit contained a number of amazing science activities. The library staff and I plan to use the new toolkit’s activities during our Yuri’s Night. I urge all SEPA members to explore the resources provided by the NISE Network.

I have high hopes for our planetarium in 2018 as I plan for the New Year and begin the search for a new Planetarium Assistant.

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

Jay Lamm reports: Our Universe Gallery is currently host to *Alyce Simon: Atomic Art*. Alyce Simon made radical artworks with the use of a particle accelerator, a machine historically referred to as “an atom smasher,” that exalt the power of nature.

We had yet another successful “Halloween Day at the Museum.” Patrons enjoyed many hands-on activities centered around a Harry Potter theme. Before the live presentation of *The Astronomical World of Harry Potter*, patrons could make their own Howler, take a selfie at our Platform 100 ^¾, guess the flavor in the Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Bean station, and enjoy a Butterbeer at our Leaky Cauldron Pub.

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December was also the premiere of another original planetarium production called *Star Wars: The Worlds Within*. This show uses the Star Wars universe as a tool to talk about recent exoplanet discoveries. Narrated by George Robinson, this 40-minute program takes visitors through the Star Wars story thread, and as each fictional world is mentioned they not only visit it up close but also visit its real-world counterpart. The show also deals a bit with how asteroids are misrepresented in sci-fi films as well as how Star Wars bends the scientific truth in its creative license.

As far as planetarium content, we welcomed *The Secrets of Gravity: In the Footsteps of Albert Einstein* as our new astronomy based show. This will go great with the recent information coming out from LIGO regarding gravitational waves. *Kaluaka'hina – The Enchanted Reef* and *Magic Treehouse: Space Mission* are our Family shows—a special hour of programming for families with younger children. In addition, we've been running *Dinosaurs Alive!* as our “B” large-format film and *Dream Big* as our “A” film. We'll also be rotating in some planetarium favorites from the past such as *Dinosaur Passage to Pangea*, *Journey to the Stars*, *Lewis & Clark: Great Journey West*, and *One World, One Sky: Big Bird's Adventure*.

To support these Family Hour shows, we've been running a live “Stargazing” segment before each 10a.m. program on Saturdays. Kids gather around a “camp fire” and learn about stars and constellations in the local nighttime sky.



SOUTH CAROLINA

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DuPont Planetarium, Aiken, SC

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Blue Cross Blue Shield of SC Planetarium
South Carolina State Museum
Columbia, SC

Liz Klimek reports: It was wonderful to see so many colleagues at the Pleiades conference in October! Many thanks to Anna Green and the staff at the St Louis Science Center for hosting a wonderful meeting. We are excited that our bid was accepted by the SEPA Council to host SEPA here in Columbia in 2019. We are still working out dates, but we'll most likely set them for a week in June. I will be reaching out to as many former hosts as I can in the months ahead for advice, words of wisdom, words of warning, and whatever thoughts people are willing to share. :-)

As usual, the end of the year was a blur of holiday shows, holiday party rentals and special events. Once again we ran *Star of Bethlehem* and *Laser Holidays*, two shows that have become a tradition at the State Museum during November and December, alongside some of our regular, non-seasonal shows. This year we also debuted *Laser Trans-Siberian Orchestra*, which we reserved for Tuesday nights when the museum is open late. For the museum's annual *Polar Express Party* for members, we once again took families to the North Pole to check out all the wondrous things that Santa can see in the sky over his workshop in our live *Santa's Sky* program.

Just after Thanksgiving, the planetarium hosted its first wedding, in which the bride and groom wanted to be married under the skies of Puerto Rico in a sort of virtual destination wedding. After the ceremony, wedding guests were treated to a night sky tour in the dome while the newlyweds went off to have their pictures taken. Barely more than one month later, we had our second planetarium wedding under a simple starry sky.

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Looking ahead, we'll take advantage of the little bit of breathing space January provides to gear up for astronomy camps, our first astronomy day celebration, and new programs this spring. Up first is a new live moon phases lesson that we'll start adding on to the end of Two Small Pieces of Glass, a show we're bringing back to our lineup due to how often it's requested by teachers. Next are some creative fun things we're going to try for Valentine's Day and for the museum's new AstroKids Membership Program, so stay tuned for details on that! □

Wishing everyone a happy, fun-filled and productive 2018!

DuPont Planetarium
Ruth Patrick Science Education Center
University of South Carolina Aiken
Aiken, SC

Gary J. Senn reports: The DuPont Planetarium at the Ruth Patrick Science Education Center (RPSEC) on the campus of the University of South Carolina Aiken (USCA) has some big news, even bigger than our upgrade to Digistar 6 in September 2017. Our Program Director, Darlene Smalley, retired on 12/31/17. She served the RPSEC, USCA and of course, the planetarium for over 18 years. Darlene has been a valuable asset to our community through her involvement in teaching programs for children, USCA students and the general public. She has developed many wonderful programs that are informative, engaging and enjoyable. She has written several planetarium shows and her voice can be heard in some of them. Darlene has done much to promote special activities related to the planetarium and has been instrumental in making the planetarium the success that it has become. We will miss her dearly and wish her well in the next phase of her life, which she is excited to say will focus on being a grandmother.

We are settling in with the new Digistar 6. We had one small bump in the road during our annual Science Education Enrichment Day (SEED). SEED is an annual event that has more than 4000 people in attendance. It was our first public presentation of our new system. The first two shows went very well, and

people were amazed at the difference between Digistar II and Digistar 6. However, during the third show, 1/2 of the dome was dark! The short story was that the physical mask fell down in front of the lens on one of the projectors. We suspected that someone bumped into the projector between the 2nd and 3rd shows. Of course, we did not know what the problem was at first. In our attempt to fix things with our auto-blending and auto-alignment, we made matters worse. So, we had to cancel the rest of the shows for the day. In the end, Evans and Sutherland was kind enough to send someone back out to reset the mask properly and get us underway again.

In December, we showed *Mystery of the Christmas Star* by Evans and Sutherland. It received a great response from our audiences. In January, we showed *Magic Tree House – Space Mission* by the Morehead Planetarium and Science Center; and a local production, *Dark Shadows*. We showed *Dark Shadows* in preparation of the lunar eclipse on January 31.



**Bentley Planetarium - Tellus Science Museum,
Cartersville, GA**

David Dundee reports: This fall we were busy with many school groups. I implemented two new Harvard - Smithsonian Grants; one in the High School and one in the middle school. Both projects involved imaging with robotic telescopes in Arizona. Virtual exhibits will open soon in the New Year, with some of the images from this project. Tellus was also awarded a NASA grant to help implement kinetic activities for or young visitors in 2018. (For National Astronomy Day in April and our Mars fest in July). We hosted about 1,000 visitors for our annual Spooky Night event in October, even though the observatory didn't open because of rain, we had activities and AVI laser shows in the planetarium. Christmas season has brought *Star of Bethlehem* and *Santa's Secret Star* back to the planetarium. Looking forward to 2018!

Georgia Southern Planetarium,
Statesboro, Ga.

Dillon Marcy reports: With the spring semester starting soon we are preparing for interns, Public Evenings and classes that we will soon have here at the Georgia Southern Planetarium. Things have changed considerably in the last few months giving us plenty of work to prepare for, and we are working hard to get ready for all the groups and students in 2018.

Last semester we had two bright interns that did a wonderful job, and luckily for us we have one that has decided to stay with us. Our intern will now continue on to the second part of the internship where instead of doing constellation shows and assisting me with our daily groups. He will now begin presenting to groups all on his own. It will be a big change for him but we are certain he will do an incredible job. Along with presenting to our daily groups we will be scripting a 15 minute presentation on our Digistar 5. This will be his big project and he will be presenting his show during our Public Evening Exploding Universe. Not only will he be presenting it for the public but he will present it for the Faculty and Staff of the Physics and Astronomy Department.

Ever since the eclipse our numbers have surged leading to some dilemmas with reserving tickets for the Public Evenings. Tickets sold out for our last Public Evening within 55 minutes with plenty of fans of ours left without the ability to see our shows. To fix this we decided to add at least three extra shows to our Public Evenings during the Thursday before our typical Public Evening. We are hoping this will help with our spring shows as we will be showing two new ones. Our first Public Evening will be one our favorites the poetic music Lichtmond at the end of January. For February will be lucky enough to have returning Dr. Alan Harvey an award winning filmographer who will present some of his latest biology films during our show Life: A Cosmic Story. In March we will finally be able to play Exploding Universe for the public as the last attempt to show it was cancelled due to Hurricane Irma. A Lot of interest has already been shown by our fans for the show, so we hope they enjoy it as well as the presentation by our intern. Last but not least we will have our newest show Led Zeppelin in April.

Thanks to a grant from Georgia Southern's "Campus Living Enhancement Committee" we are now able to bring in a rock show for our spring semester to pair it with our Pink Floyd show we host in fall.

A Lot will be happening this spring, and we are looking forward to it. From our intern working on his own presentation to the two new shows we will be presenting it will be an amazing time and we hope others will be able to make it our way. We leave 2017 with an annual attendance just below 10,000 and with our increase in popularity we are certain to have the same attendance if not greater for 2018.

James A. Smith Planetarium,
Walker County Schools, Chickamauga, GA

John M. Hart reports: Things are going quite well here at the Smith Planetarium. We decided to try something new this year and offered a special Halloween Show to the general public. We advertised it as "The Haunted Planetarium" and the response was even better than we anticipated. We decorated our planetarium up with a haunted house theme and had costumes, treats and candy for the kids. For the show, we decided to focus on the seasonal constellations of autumn. In addition, we told ghost stories under the dome. We had a full house and the show was a complete hit with the audience. We found that there are many parents looking for alternative Halloween activities for their kids.... other than traditional trick or treating. This was our first time doing this and the response was overwhelmingly positive. We plan to expand this theme next year and offer a Halloween Show again. This may be an idea for other planetariums to implement as well, if they are not already doing Halloween programs. Upcoming plans here include the presentation of our annual holiday program "Season of Light" and the installation of an additional sensor (barometric pressure) to our NOAA weather station. We have also founded a volunteer group called the "Friends of the Smith Planetarium" to help support, grow and better promote our facility. We already have 30 members in this group. We have also been exploring additional ways to bring in more revenue. In Jan. we are starting annual memberships here as well. Annual memberships will start at a base price of \$100. We will be issuing membership cards which entitle the holder to attend public shows for free at our planetarium throughout the school year. We will also be publishing a newsletter for our members. We are also exploring the possibility of a part

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nership with the USGS to install a Seismic Monitoring Station on our site. This is not set in stone yet but we will keep everybody posted on the progress.



East Kentucky Science Center,
Prestonsburg, KY.

Steven LJ Russo reports: Our NASA exhibit: “The Hubble Space Telescope. New Views of the Universe”, is now just a memory. In the seven months that it has been here, around 10,000 people visited the exhibit. This included school children, the general public, and tour groups from places like Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and New York. And just before it closed, a woman and her daughter drove here from Atlanta Georgia (over 400 miles) just to see the exhibit on its last day.

But like most other planetariums, our big event was the Solar Eclipse. I would never had imagined that we would have had a crowd that big; 5000 people (we gave out 4800 eclipse watching devices) joined myself and my staff for this amazing event. Prestonsburg’s population is only 3200 people!

We had the Sun’s image projected on a large screen outdoors, through my old Edmund Astroscan telescope. That proved to be a big hit as many people took pictures with the image of the eclipse. The NASA webcast was shown in our exhibit hall, classroom, and planetarium, and the Science Center was open free of charge for people to come in and see the NASA Hubble Space Telescope exhibit.

Even though from here, we only had 93% totality, we had live TV coverage from local networks, CBS, ABC, and Fox.

Prestonsburg Mayor Les Stapleton showed up to help hand out Eclipse glasses and Kentucky House of Representatives member Larry Brown was there too. Also in attendance was Kelsie May, star of The Voice TV program.

This ended up being the biggest event in the 13-year history of the EKSC and one of the biggest public events in the history of Prestonsburg. Because of that, East Kentucky Science Center and Planetarium Director Steve Russo was honored by Prestonsburg Mayor Les Stapleton and the Prestonsburg City Council for the Science Center’s historic Solar Eclipse event. He received a Proclamation for his “role as educator and pursuer of the betterment of the community”.

Our Halloween event was attended by over 1200 people. There was a trunk or treat, spooky science activities, and our Fright Light Laser Show.



EKSC Director Steve Russo with some Eclipse watchers.



“Look to the Skies!!!!”

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And just down the road about three hours from me, Drew Foster sent in this report which appeared in the U of L newspaper.

Rauch Planetarium, Louisville, KY

Drew Foster reports: More than 140 people raised a toast to the new, permanent William G. Russell Meteor Collection Exhibit at Gheens Science Hall and Rauch Planetarium during its debut Dec. 17.

The standing-room-only crowd included members of the public, UofL College of Education and Human Development Dean Ann Larson, and family and friends of the late collector William Russell, whose wife Mary Ann generously donated the impressive group of 132 specimens (90 of them are meteorites) to the university in the hopes of furthering space education.

The exhibition includes a rarity in space specimen collections, said Tom Tretter, director of the planetarium: Several of the meteorites can be touched.

When Mary Ann Russell asked a young boy at the debut whether he had touched the meteorites, he gave the response she hoped for: "That was so cool!"

Tretter gave the crowd an overview of the collection and introduced some of its other highlights, including a fragment of a meteor that hit Louisville in 1977 and a small container of dust from Mars. He said schoolchildren have already been to see the new exhibit, which is permanently housed in the lobby of Gheens Science Hall and Rauch Planetarium and is available for viewing during weekend shows and by special arrangement.

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Meteorites photo provided by the University of Louisville.

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And don't forget my Bluegrass friends, send me all of your happenings for Southern Skies.

Until next time,

"Look to the Skies!!!!"

Steven LJ Russo

TENNESSEE

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The Autozone Dome at
The Sharpe Planetarium
Memphis, Tennessee
david.maness@memphistn.gov

Dave Maness reports: I know this is after the Holidays by the time you read this but it is in full swing while I am writing it. One of our Christmas traditions here is the annual Festival of Trees and Santa's Village. This is done to benefit Le Bonheur Children's Hospital. Each tree is decorated in a theme by business groups and later judged for beauty and originality. Santa's village includes an animatronic winter wonderland, a large set of trains in motion, and a long table filled with gingerbread house creations by local artists. Of course, by the time you read this it will be just a memory.

The autumn season was slow for us at the beginning but seems to be picking up as we enter the Holiday period. Our feature program has been Season of Light since just before Thanksgiving. It will end its short run on December 31. For the New Year we will open with Perfect Little Planet. That leaves us with a slot open at 4:00, usually filled by the recent feature program. This year I decided to see how well Space Park 360 will do in the timeslot.

I am working nearly every day on the plans for the SEPA Conference we will host here in Memphis, June 5-9, 2018. Memphis last hosted way back in 1981. It was my very first SEPA conference. I had no idea that I would one day be inviting SEPA to return to "The Bluff City", as it is sometimes called. I already knew that it was one of two "Music" cities in Tennessee. I hope to give folks a chance to explore some of its history while you are here. I hope you will plan to join this June. Registration information should be posted on the SEPA website.

Dave Maness.



Bays Mountain Planetarium, Kingsport, TN
Astronomy & Space Sciences Program Coordinator -
Planetarium Director Adam Thanz

Adam Thanz reports: Greetings Fellow Planetarians!

StarFest 2017 Well Received

I'm happy to announce that our annual StarFest astronomical 3-day event went very well as usual. The theme was "Stellar Places." Our four keynote speakers were all related to the topic at hand, providing a very focused event. They were: Mitzi Adams, Solar Scientist, NASA Marshall Space Flight

Center, "*The Sun: A Star to Study in Our Backyard.*" John Debes, Team Lead - Space Telescope Imaging Spectrograph, Space Telescope Science Institute, "*Planetary Tales from the*

Stellar Crypt: Exoplanets Surviving the Death of their Host Star." Glenn Schneider, Astronomer and EXCEDE Project Principal Investigator, Steward Observatory and the Department of Astronomy, "*In Quest of Astronomical Shadows: On Earth, in our Solar System, and Beyond.*" Sean S. Lindsay, Astronomy Coordinator, UT Knoxville, "*Baking the Solar System: Our Modern Thoughts on How Our Solar System Formed.*" We also enjoyed a panel discussion in which our speakers could answer more open-ended questions from myself and the other delegates. I feel that we get a much better understanding of our speakers and their jobs as they answer with unprepared responses. We continue to attract a younger audience! About 25% were college-aged! Of course, we enjoyed planetarium shows, observing, lots of great food, and the camaraderie of spending three days with like-minded friends.

Origins Spectrograph" from Fiske Planetarium to the general public. Our current main program is "*Out There - The Quest for Extrasolar Worlds*" and we'll follow with a short star ID.

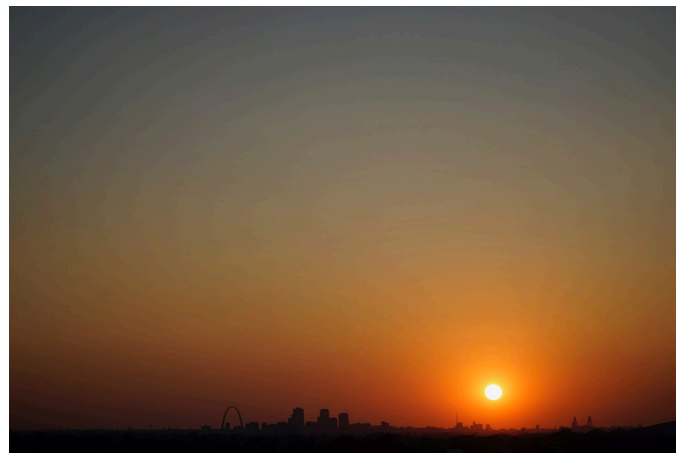
Our 2 p.m. shows continue to be an alternating schedule of live star ID and a show from the past.

Show Production

It's an ongoing saga here regarding production as it takes much of our time. Jason and I attended the Pleiades Conference in St. Louis and presented our latest production, "Totality." I am happy to say that there was quite a positive reaction to the show, both during the showing and afterwards from some of our colleagues! We are now in the process of updating our production infrastructure with new computers, servers, etc. The computers we currently use on our desktops are Mac Pros, quite capable, but are 10 years old. As I write this, we are working on upgrading to the new iMac Pro and modernizing how we handle data. We are excited by this as it should greatly speed up, and improve, our productions. There may be a talk in this...

Pleiades National Conference

As stated earlier, we did attend the Pleiades conference in October. I will say that it went very well. There were some hitches, but there always are in any conference. I was able to enjoy some very nice presentations and workshops. We were also able to attend our first mini-LIPS conference! I am including an image I took of sunset at St. Louis taken from the main mound at Cahokia. Enjoy!



St. Louis Sunset from Cahokia.jpg - image by Adam Thanz

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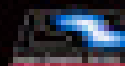
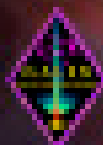


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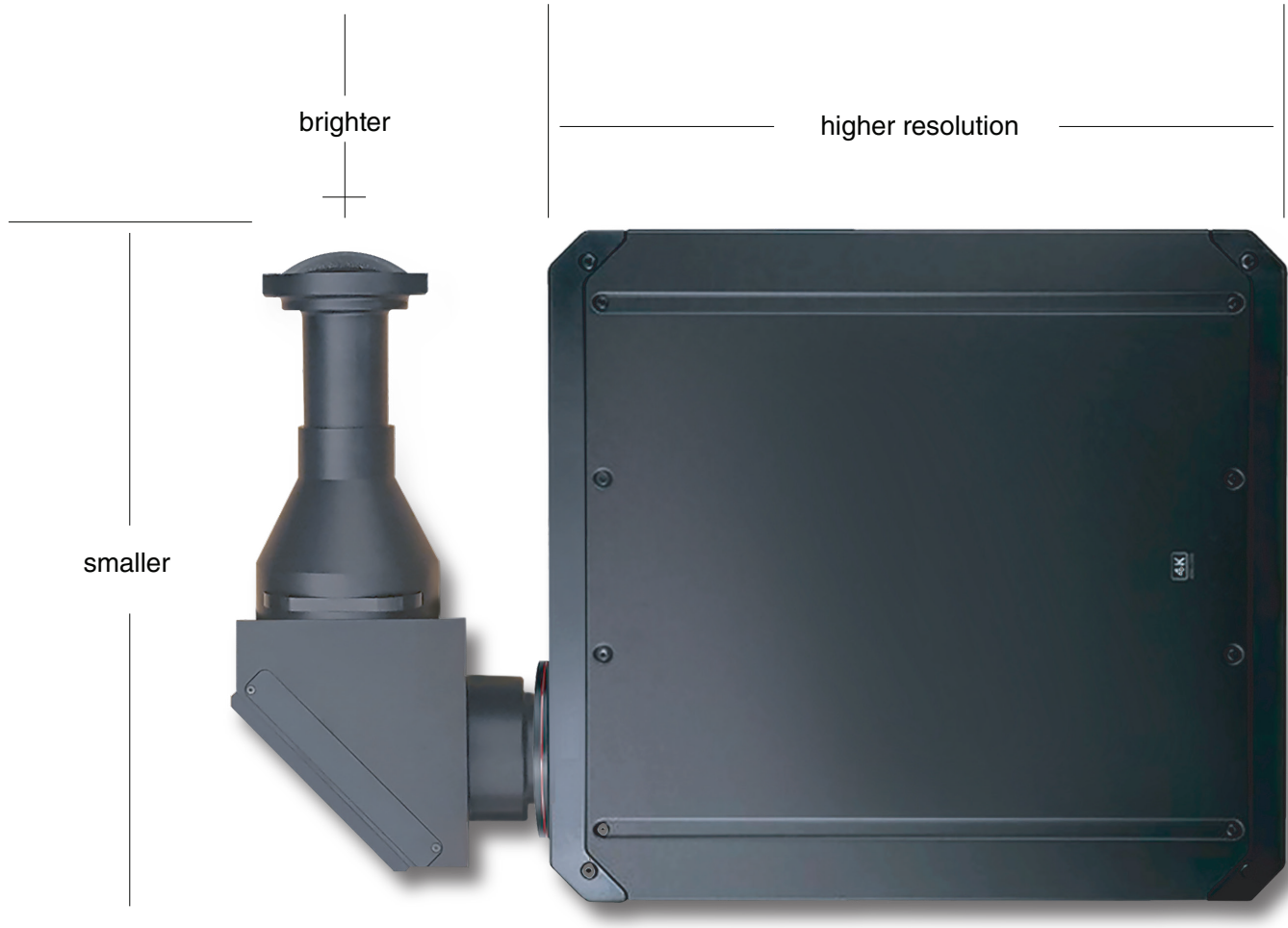
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