

SANDRA F. PRITCHARD MATHER PLANETARIUM NEWS

2017-2018 Season

The Mather Planetarium at West Chester University



Greetings! We're starting this season off with a bang! Actually, it's not so much a bang but rather an "ooh" and an "aah". We've got a solar eclipse and a dedication event in just a few weeks. After that we'll launch into the 2017-2018 season of public events. Tickets for the first live show go on sale on August 18th. The movie show dates will be added to our webpage in a few weeks. We have a new movie on asteroids to debut as well. What an exciting start to the new season! See you under the dome!

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*"Give me the splendid silent sun, with
all his beams full-dazzling."*

- Walt Whitman

Live Shows for the 2017-2018 Season

September 8, 2017 – Black Holes Don't Suck

October 6, 2017 – Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

November 3, 2017 – Once in a Blue Moon

January 26, 2018 – Astronomy on the Internet:
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

February 23, 2018 – The Final Frontier

March 23, 2018 – Fire in the Sky

April 20, 2018 – Citizen Science

Movie shows will be added to the schedule soon. Check our website for updates.

Special Events

During the month of August we'll be hosting two exciting events at the Mather Planetarium, on the same day. One is brought to us by the heavens while the other is more Earthly in nature, but still just as spectacular!

The Great American Eclipse

On August 21st, 2017 a total solar eclipse will pass over the U.S. from Oregon to South Carolina. This is the first total eclipse seen on the mainland U.S. since 1979. It's the first eclipse to cross the entire country since 1918. That's a pretty big deal! Pennsylvania isn't in the path of totality but we'll see a 75% partial eclipse.

I will be hosting a public viewing of the eclipse on WCU's academic quad. We will have some solar telescopes, eclipse glasses, and fun activities going on from 1-4pm. If it's cloudy we may not be able to see the eclipse but the activities will still be running and we'll be ready with the telescopes in case it clears. In the event of rain, we'll move into the Ehinger gymnasium where we'll have a NASA live feed of the eclipse.

This is a free event. No reservations or tickets are necessary. Parking information can be found on our website, as well as a campus map showing the locations of the quad and the gym.

Beautification Project

We are very excited to announce that our beautification project is finally complete! You've been reading bits and pieces about it in these newsletters for over a year. This summer the Sun Sculpture – the last piece – was installed.



A celebration is planned for the same day as the eclipse – fitting for a Sun Sculpture! The event will take place in the courtyard outside the planetarium entrance. WCU President Dr. Chris Fiorentino will address the guests at 5:30pm. The artists will be on-hand to talk about their works. Light refreshments and planetarium tours will be provided. This event is free and open to the public. We kindly request that interested parties RSVP by August 14th on the WCU foundation website. Parking information and a link to RSVP can be found on the Mather Planetarium webpage.



The programs in the Mather Planetarium are made possible by generous donations from the community. To learn more about how you can support our educational and public activities please contact Dr. Karen Schwarz at (610) 436-2788, kschwarz@wcupa.edu.



Looking Up: Hercules

A prominent summer constellation, many people may know of Hercules from the 1997 Disney movie. The movie, while not quite accurate, does have parts of the story right.

Hercules (Heracles, to the Greeks) was the son of Zeus and Alcmene, a mortal woman. Because his father was a god, Hercules was born with amazing strength. There are many stories of Hercules adventures, with different versions of each one.

One of the more well-known stories involves the 12 labors of Hercules. These chores were penance, dealt out by King Eurystheus after Hercules killed his wife and son in a state of madness. You can see why Disney had to clean things up for the movie! One labor (which did show up in the movie) was to slay the nine-headed Hydra, which is its own constellation.

Hercules can be found high in the sky this time of year, almost straight overhead after sunset. The constellation mostly resembles a not-quite-regular square, often referred to as the “keystone” due to its likeness of the keystone in an arch.

Along the western side of the keystone lies the globular star cluster, M13. The Great Cluster in Hercules is considered to be the finest cluster of its type visible in the northern hemisphere. It consists of a group of 300,000 stars which lay 22,200 lightyears away from Earth. The cluster is 168 lightyears across. That’s over 10 million times the Earth-Sun distance!

Because the cluster is so large, it can be seen with the unaided eye in a dark sky. It will appear as a small, fuzzy patch, about 2/3 the size of the full Moon. For an even better view, grab a pair of binoculars and you’ll see more definition. It’s worth checking out!