

ON CAMPUS APRIL 21

Astronomy Day will help promote efforts to reopen OCC planetarium

Free event offers view of the sun, stars and planets

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TOMS RIVER — The Robert J. Novins Planetarium remains closed, but its supporters will use annual Astronomy Day activities April 21 at Ocean County College to promote new efforts to raise \$1.5 million to refurbish and reopen the star theater.

Hosted by the Astronomical Society of the Toms River Area, or ASTRA, the free annual event aims to "bring astronomy to the people" with exhibits, workshops and telescopes guests can use to see the stars and planets.

All activities take place on campus (signs will direct visitors), and all are free.

A daytime program from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. will be held rain or shine, with exhibits, activities and demonstrations.

Starting at 11 a.m. there will be hourly demonstrations on "how to make a comet" and how craters are formed on the moon. Visitors will have a chance, weather permitting, to safely look at the sun's surface through special solar telescopes.

People who own their own telescopes may bring them along to get technical advice from ASTRA members on how to use them. At 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m., members will hold telescope workshops to help prospective buyers decide on the types that best suit their needs.

The third weekend in April is marked by astronomy clubs and professional institutions around the country holding such open-house events, and the OCC Astronomy Day is held by ASTRA in cooperation with the Robert J. Novins Planetarium.

The planetarium closed last September after repeated equipment breakdowns, and now the nonprofit Save the Planetarium Fund and the college board of trustees have mounted major fundraising efforts to reopen the facility.

"Even though the Novins Planetarium theater is closed for shows at this time, we still believe it is important to continue the tradition of Astronomy Day, by hosting the activities and events here at Ocean County College," planetarium Director Gloria Villalobos said in announcing the April 21 schedule.

While there are no shows in the planetarium theater, Villalobos will make her Starlab portable planetarium available for hourly viewings during the daytime program.

The evening program will be held from 7:30 to 10 p.m. if weather permits, with ASTRA members setting up their telescopes for public viewing; they anticipate good views of Saturn, Venus and a crescent moon.



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