

REFLECTIONS / REFRACTIONS

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University Lowbrow
Astronomers

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Visit Your Local Planetarium (...or at least remind people they exist!)

By Norbert Vance

I can remember my first visit to a planetarium, Cranbrook, oh so many years ago. It was an exciting experience having gotten a telescope from Santa only a few years before. I was already in touch with the stars. So here I was, in a place devoted to just that... the stars. And planets, and galaxies, and dinosaurs, wow! Then we got to see a telescope in an observatory. As a 13 year old on summer break it was quite the experience. It reinforced what I had already come to love. Too bad the place was WAY the heck over on the other side of Detroit from my Allen Park home. It may as well been the other side of the Milky Way. I had to convince my older brother to drive us there. Turns out, he enjoyed it, too.

The financial closure of the Detroit Science Center should be a reminder that we who get about amongst the public should encourage others to visit these ambassadors of astronomy. When I toured the DSC one day early last fall it was teeming with school kids. Who knew that it was struggling so? All seemed well, at least on the surface. But given the state's economy this news was not terribly surprising... just another sad chapter in the situation we find ourselves. Hopefully that ship can right itself and reopen soon. The center had taken great strides in improving its fare the past couple of decades. Its planetarium director, John Schroer, a devoted employee of the center finds himself in an odd pickle. He also currently serves as President of the Great Lakes Planetarium Association (GLPA). It's disheartening to have the rug pulled from under you while serving such a respected organization. The DSC has to climb out of a pretty deep financial hole.

Fortunately, the state is rich with places to visit... the Exhibit Museum of course, Cranbrook, MSU Abrams, Wayne State, Chaffee in Grand Rapids to name a few. Cranbrook is in the midst of major upgrades and is spending big dollars thanks to some grants. Wayne State in Detroit and Ritter Planetarium at the University of Toledo have new SciDome HD full dome systems. Adrian College's Robinson Planetarium is getting a work over; new seats, paint, repairs, and perhaps a digital dome system to supplement its optical-mechanical projector (note: planetarians do NOT say "upgrade" because the purists insist that computers can't touch the old star balls for nice pinpoint star realism... not yet). Pioneer High School's Argus Planetarium had a nice write up in the Ann Arbor News last month. Forgive me if I didn't mention more! If YOU haven't been to one, I encourage YOU to go. Dig into that jar of nickels and dimes.

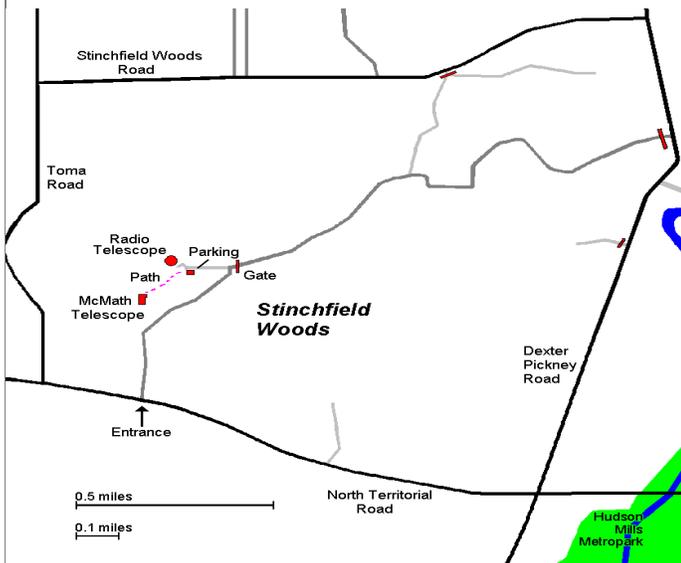
Oh yes, EMU will have a modest public schedule ready sometime in the near future as we tweak our program and build a library of programs in our first year of operation. For now, we are quite busy with classes and requests from groups and schools. I personally advertise for the neighbors as much as for ourselves because we all want to see these places thrive. In preparing for the opening of our facility, I was fortunate to have the willing assistance and encouragement of the GLPA membership in design and programming. I got some very valuable ideas and suggestions, plus saw plenty of vendor choices at the three conferences I've attended since joining "Glip-pah". They are pleased to have us in the group, and vice versa. We will host our first state GLPA meeting on March 17th at the sphere. No doubt we will discuss the financial issues that confront planetaria, that's always an issue. But there are new technologies that continue to evolve. New full dome movie experiences to grab the public imagination are released each year. Ideas are shared to make even the veteran star balls new again. It's a time to be positive.

So, I look forward to July when the Lowbrows visit us once more. I trust that's the plan for Charlie and company? We'll have plenty of new stuff to show off. Just wait until you see the night sky shown with our most recent update, the GALACTIC coordinate grid projection, witnessed as the Earth turns. Wow! It gave me goose bumps. Well, OK... I'm into that. But you have to see it!

Places & Times

Dennison Hall, also known as The University of Michigan's Physics & Astronomy building, is the site of the monthly meeting of the University Lowbrow Astronomers. Dennison Hall can be found on Church Street about one block north of South University Avenue in Ann Arbor, MI. The meetings are usually held in room 130, and on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7:30 pm. During the summer months and when weather permits, a club observing session at the Peach Mountain Observatory will follow the meeting.

Peach Mountain Observatory is the home of the University of Michigan's 25 meter radio telescope as well as the University's McMath 24" telescope which is maintained and operated by the Lowbrows. The observatory is located northwest of Dexter, MI; the entrance is on North Territorial Rd. 1.1 miles west of Dexter-Pinckney Rd. A small maize & blue sign on the north side of the road marks the gate. Follow the gravel road to the top of the hill and a parking area near the radio telescopes, then walk along the path between the two fenced in areas (about 300 feet) to reach the McMath telescope building.



Public Open House / Star Parties

Public Open Houses / Star Parties are generally held on the Saturdays before and after the New Moon at the Peach Mountain observatory, but are usually cancelled if the sky is cloudy at sunset or the temperature is below 10 degrees F. For the most up to date info on the Open House / Star Party status call: (734)332-9132. Many members bring their telescope to share with the public and visitors are welcome to do the same. Peach Mountain is home to millions of hungry mosquitoes, so apply bug repellent, and it can get rather cold at night, please dress accordingly.

Membership

Membership dues in the University Lowbrow Astronomers are \$20 per year for individuals or families, \$12 per year for students and seniors (age 55+) and \$5 if you live outside of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan.

This entitles you to the access to our monthly Newsletters on-line at our website and use of the 24" McMath telescope (after some training).

A hard copy of the Newsletter can be obtained with an additional \$12 annual fee to cover printing and postage.

(See the website

<http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/theclub/>

for more information on joining the club).

Membership in the Lowbrows can also get you a discount on these magazine subscriptions:

Sky & Telescope - \$32.95 / year

Astronomy - \$34.00 / year or \$60.00 for 2 years

For more information contact the club Treasurer.

Newsletter Contributions

Members and (non-members) are encouraged to write about any astronomy related topic of interest.



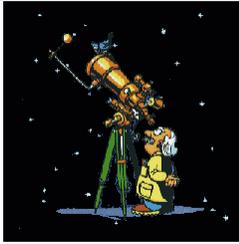
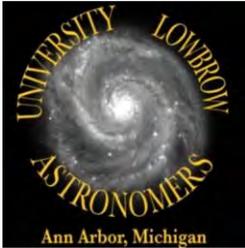
Lowbrow's Home Page

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David Jorgensen has made an EQ yoke mount for an 8" f/6 Newtonian, and promises an article soon.

