

Stars illuminate Buckstaff Planetarium

by Shane Arman - Thursday, December 04, 2008

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/1528/stars-illuminate-buckstaff-planetarium/>

It doesn't have to be a clear night in Oshkosh to enjoy constellations. The Buckstaff Planetarium at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is a venue dedicated not only to star gazing, but also to educating the community about astronomy.

The University's Science Outreach program provides interactive learning opportunities through educational shows offered about once a month during the academic year. The shows, which are open to the public, cover various subjects concerning space, stars and the solar system.

Teaching assistants like Mohamed Yakub prepare program content, aimed at educating students at all different grade levels.

"We organize, promote and run the shows," Yakub said. Assistants also add information and update the show content when needed.

The next show at the planetarium is "Christmas Nights" at 7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 5. Attendees can receive \$1 off their admission by bringing a non-perishable food item.

Besides the monthly public shows, the planetarium frequently hosts private field trips in coordination with local schools' curricula. The planetarium's most popular show, "Earth in the Solar System," was sponsored by a grant from the state.

"Every third grader in the area has come and watched that show because it covers their astronomy unit for school," Yakub said.

Shows start with a 20-25 minute slide show on the topic. Next, the teaching assistant turns on the stars, projecting them onto the dome of the planetarium.

"We point out constellations that we talked about in the show or seasonal constellations that the audience would be able to go out and see that night," Yakub said.

Audience members range from early elementary school children to college students to parents and grandparents. Yakub said audiences enjoy the interactive nature of the show and constellation stories passed on from older generations. Younger audience members also receive a take-home activity after the show.

Science Outreach tries to cater their shows to suit the educational backgrounds of its audience. Yakub said they want to present useful information that teaches them something new about the subject.

Upcoming show topics and dates can be found at www.uwosh.edu/science_outreach/planetariumm.htm.

Cost is \$3 for adults and \$2 for children, with seating limited to 50 people.

Buckstaff Planetarium also serves as a resource for the astronomy and physics department.