

"Our Sky Tonight," free star shows for the community

Posted by [JeroldMassie](#) On 01/09/2019

Waldorf, MD- For the past three years, the James E. Richmond Science Center has hosted Our Sky Tonight, a planetarium show with the intent of getting Southern Maryland residents "interested in space and science."

Founded in 2014, the science center is attached to St. Charles High School and touts a 184-seat "Digital Dome Classroom" but is still a hidden gem in the community. Patrick Rowley, the center's technology facilitator, expressed that most people visit the center "and go, 'I had no idea you were here.'"

Though it is hidden, turnout for the free sky shows is typically around "80-120 or so" of the 184 maximum. Rowley stated, "two or three months ago" the science center was "over capacity" for a show, with 189 individuals wanting to learn about the celestial objects overhead.

"A lot of times we just show movies in here, full-dome movies, but we wanted to make sure that we were using the planetarium functions for the community," stated Rowley. The shows allow Rowley to show the constellations, stars, and planets that are visible every month to the, typically, young enthusiasts. The shows typically see "Elementary school kids and their parents, and couples in their 40s and 50s" as their audience.

The primary purpose of the planetarium is as a resource for the area's schools. "We see almost 27,000 students a year on field trips," of which come from Charles, St. Mary's, and Calvert counties, but include some PG county and DC schools as well as private and home school students, Rowley explained.

Rowley's favorite part of being the center's Technology Facilitator, or "Sphere Master"---his "unofficial" title---is the monthly sky shows. "The crowd that comes is super into it, they really want to be here." Rowley also stated that he enjoys developing the "data sets for the science on the sphere."

The center's winter hours are Wednesdays and Thursdays, doors open at 6 p.m., Fulldome show at 6:45 p.m., exploration stations open 6-7:45 p.m. The center is also open on the first and third Saturdays every month, doors open at 9 a.m., Fulldome show at 9:30 a.m., 10:45 a.m., and 12 p.m., exploration stations open 9 a.m.-12:45 p.m.

The "Our Sky Tonight" shows are on the first Monday of every month, second if it falls on a holiday. The upcoming dates are Feb. 4, March 4, and April 1. The center is also hosting a Valentine's Day show on the evening of Feb. 14.

For more information visit the James E. Richmond Science Center web site [here](#).

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