

View the grandeur of the universe at observatory

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Despite the increasing number of people who choose to make Central Oregon their home, the night skies here, at least for now, remain relatively dark. This is good news for those seeking the awe-inspiring sights of celestial objects that can only be witnessed from truly dark skies. And one of the best facilities for viewing the grandeur of our universe is the Oregon Observatory located at Sunriver Resort south of Bend.

Operating in conjunction with the Sunriver Nature Center, the Oregon Observatory is a nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring present and future generations to understand and cherish the night sky and the wonders that lie within. With a knowledgeable staff and outstanding equipment, they pull it off superbly.

The Oregon Observatory has one of the largest collections of telescopes for public use in the country. They range in size from the giant 30-inch instrument, which is housed in its own building with a roll-off roof, to a high-quality four-inch planetary scope. The size refers to the telescope's aperture, or diameter of its light-collecting lens or mirror. Larger apertures produce brighter images.

But what can visitors expect to see when they get there? It turns out that the summer night sky is filled with some of the finest examples of various types of celestial objects, that include: diffuse nebulae (clouds of

dust and gas floating in space where new stars are being born), planetary nebulae (old stars that have ejected their outer atmospheres into rings or shells), open star clusters (collections of young, bright stars), globular clusters (densely packed balls of very old stars), far-off galaxies, and Albireo, generally regarded as the best, most colorful double star in the entire sky.

When asked why visitors should travel to Sunriver to look into the night sky, observatory staff member (and Sisters High School graduate) Grant Tandy explained, "Not only do we offer a unique educational and viewing experience for those interested in astronomy, we also strive to build a stronger connection between our guests and the natural world."

Tandy grew up in Sisters and still remembers being inspired to take up astronomy as a hobby when he was a student in Rima Givot's astronomy class in high school, and by attending a few of the Stars over Sisters star watches put on by the Sisters Astronomy Club.

Tandy also helps out with an outreach program, where from noon to 2 p.m. on Mondays the Oregon Observatory sets up two solar telescopes in front of the Strictly Organic Coffee shop at the Old Mill District in Bend. In addition, Oregon Observatory representatives attend various star parties throughout the Northwest.

Another astronomy expert on staff at the Oregon Observatory from the Sisters area is Lynn Carroll. He is

also an active member of the Sisters Astronomy Club.

Not comfortable resting on its laurels for very long, the Oregon Observatory has expansion plans. The highest priority item on the list is to erect another roll-off roof building to house additional telescopes and displays. Increasing the size of its parking lot and building a planetarium are also on the wish list. Fundraising will likely begin next year.

The observatory is currently operating on its summer schedule, which will continue until September 1. It is open six days a week, Tuesday through Sunday, 9 to 11 p.m. for nighttime viewing. The cost is \$8 for adults, \$6 for children 2 through 12 years of age. A typical evening under the stars includes an astronomy-related presentation, a constellation tour using green laser pointers and, of course, spectacular views through top-quality telescopes.

Solar viewing, which is free, takes place from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. using telescopes fitted with special filters to reveal features on the sun.

Besides welcoming individuals and families on a nightly basis, the Oregon Observatory can also accommodate larger groups of people by conducting private star parties. The rent for private parties includes a knowledgeable staff on hand to position telescopes on some of the



PHOTO PROVIDED

Oregon Observatory staff conduct observing sessions six nights a week, Tuesday through Sunday 9 to 11 p.m., during the summer months.

most exciting objects our skies have to offer.

As the New Horizons spacecraft makes its closest approach to Pluto on the evening of July 14, the observatory will put on a Pluto party to include presentations about the distant dwarf planet, along with a live video feed from NASA.

If you go to the observatory for night viewing, dress warmly. Central Oregon's


high desert can cool off quickly, even in the middle of summer. Bringing along some insect repellent would also be a good idea.

For more information regarding the Oregon Observatory, refer to its website, www.oregonobservatory.org or find them on Facebook.

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