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STARS
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the statute change will expand the facility's role in the community

"Once the word gets around," Elvert said, "the community will see us as a real resource. Right now it's an under-used resource."

The planetarium's stellar effects are created by 35 projectors and an \$85,000 rotating star generator. The images are projected on the dome of the facility and can be manipulated by a sophisticated console at the back of the room. The planetarium can accommodate about 115 stargazers.

Schools, including the University and Lane Community College, use the facility to teach basic and advanced astronomy.

But the planetarium's ability to combine music with spectacular 360-degree views of the night sky and three-dimensional projections, makes it a natural crowd pleaser.

"The instrument projects about 6,000 stars onto the dome," Elvert said. "We can get pretty complicated, but we can also be an entertainment facility."

Moonlighting as an entertainment facility, the planetarium has experimented with a number of combinations, including Shakespearean performances set to galactic projections and musical revues.

The "Starlight Musical Revue" features popular songs with cosmic and atmospheric themes. The music is combined with 360-degree interpretations projected on the dome. For example, the song "Stormy Weather" is accompanied by swirling clouds and periodic bursts of simulated lightning.

Other scheduled offerings range from educational to entertaining.

- "Starlit Nights," offered June 17 through Sept. 6, takes the audience on a tour of the summer night sky. Many constellations are identified, and ancient and modern legends are told.
- "Cosmic Catastrophes," offered Sept. 11 through Nov. 29, describes catastrophic events that have occurred and could occur again on Earth and in space.
- "The Little Star that Could," offered June 20 through Sept. 5, is aimed at children ages five to eight. The show teaches about the origins of celestial bodies

Planetarium show gazes into the past

By Tim Neff
Emerald Associate Editor

The Lane County Planetarium will supplement its regular "Starlit Nights" program this Sunday with a representation of how the night sky appeared more than 5,000 years ago.

The one-time event coincides with "Time Shift," a cosmic sequel to the 1987 new age event known as Harmonic Convergence. The Planetarium program will feature stars that many new age thinkers consider important to Time Shift.

MoiRa Timms, a local futurist and author, approached the Planetarium with the idea of educating the community about ancient astronomy.

"There are certain stars that were important to the ancient world," Timms said. "This will be a look at how the night sky looked 5,000 years ago."

Planetarium director John Elvert said he decided to run the program because it has legitimate astronomical value unrelated to its new age roots.

"We're not going to entertain anything in here that is not serious," Elvert said.

The Planetarium program will feature the Sirius star and Venus. The two celestial bodies were important to the ancient Egyptian and Mayan cultures.

Timms said Sunday will mark the beginning of a new epoch in the history of the Earth and the universe. According to the ancient Mayan and Aztec calendars, different time cycles are due to synchronize next weekend.

"The idea of linear time will be merging with a more cyclical concept of time," Timms said.

Alan Stein, owner of Star Gate Awareness Resources, said the new concept of time will allow people to become more closely attuned to natural rhythms.

"Linear time is out of synch with natural cycles," Stein said. "That could be the cause of a lot of problems. If we lived more naturally we could become more knowing."

Timms said Sunday's Planetarium program will educate people about the astronomical observations that ancient peoples, like the Aztecs, used as a basis for living.

"The wisdom of the ancient cultures are becoming more important to us," Timms said. "We're looking back to them for guidance."

and what they are made of.

- "Perseus Meteor Shower Party" will coincide with the meteor shower Aug. 11. The planetarium program will educate about the composition and origin of meteors.
- "Star of Wonder," offered Dec. 4 through Jan. 3, will investigate whether the Star of Bethlehem was a myth or an actual astronomical event.

Elvert said the planetarium hopes to raise about \$25,000 to purchase a new automation system next year. The facility will launch a fund raising campaign this September.

Elvert said the new system is needed to bring the 1970s-vintage planetarium into the 1990s.

"The new automation system would be more versatile and more flexible," Elvert said. "The community would really benefit as well as the schools."

The future of the public programming hinges on letting people know about the often-overlooking facility.

"It's just a matter of getting the public aware of where we are and what we are doing," Elvert said. "We have not been, up until recently, a public resource."

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