

NJMC NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NJMC William D. McDowell Observatory Open to Public for Free on Monday and Wednesday Nights

Jupiter, Mars, Orion Shine in January and February

LYNDHURST, N.J. – Stargazers of all ages and experience levels are invited to view the night sky’s celestial sensations for free on Monday and Wednesday evenings year-round at the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission’s (NJMC) William D. McDowell Observatory in DeKorte Park, the home of the NJMC.

“For novice, amateur and seasoned astronomers alike, the William D. McDowell Observatory offers a great opportunity to experience the breathtaking beauty of our solar system and the universe through a state-of-the-art telescope,” said Marcia Karrow, Executive Director of the NJMC. “The Observatory also makes for an ideal family night and can foster an interest in astronomy and a healthy curiosity for learning among children at a young age.”

The telescope will offer excellent views of Jupiter, the moon and the constellation Orion in January and into February. Mars will make its presence known in late February and throughout March. The Observatory, which opened in 2008, is home to a research-grade telescope with a 20-inch mirror housed under a six-meter retractable dome. The telescope’s features include an advanced optical guidance system to cut through light pollution.

Public viewing nights are from 7 to 10 p.m. in January and February and 8 to 10 p.m. in March, weather permitting and excluding holidays. Observatory Director Dr. John Sloan assists the public in viewing the stars, planets and constellations and provides context by describing their characteristics and significance. Pre-registration is not required to attend public viewing nights. Participants must be able to climb 25 steps to reach the telescope. The Observatory also welcomes Scout Troops and other community organizations for private viewing sessions when possible.

Dr. Sloan also leads a “Let’s Talk Astronomy Learning Series” every Tuesday from 7 to 9 p.m. The program features themed discussions for each month, followed by a chance to view objects related to the topic. In February, sessions will focus on the basics of astronomy, the Milky Way and quasars. Talks in March center on solar systems.

“Let’s Talk Astronomy” sessions are \$15 per month and are free for Meadowlands Environment Center members. Classes are limited to 15 participants and pre-registration is required. Educators can earn professional development credits through the program.

For more information about the William D. McDowell Observatory, open public viewing nights and the “Let’s Talk Astronomy Learning Series,” call 201-460-8300, visit www.njmeadowlands.gov/ec and click on the “Astronomy Programs” button, or email observatory@njmeadowlands.gov. You can also visit the William D. McDowell Observatory page on Facebook and follow the observatory on twitter at @MECObservatory.

Public viewing nights are cancelled due to inclement weather, which can include heavy clouds as well as precipitation. Please use the contact information listed above to check for cancellations.

About William D. McDowell:

William D. McDowell was the first Executive Director of the NJMC, then known as the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission, upon its creation in 1969. McDowell, who died in 2007 at age 80, was also the first Bergen County Executive and a Bergen County Sheriff and Freeholder. In addition, he served as Mayor of North Arlington and as a Borough Councilman.

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