

Astronomy Newsletter for November 2010

At 2:00 am on Sunday, November 7th, we move the clocks back one hour to Central Standard Time. This change takes place on the first Sunday of November, and therefore the sunrise on November 6th (the latest Saturday we can have on Daylight Saving Time) will be the latest sunrise we can have - about 7:35 am. That means an extra hour of stargazing. On November 7th, the first stars will be visible by 5:10 pm and it will be completely dark by 6 pm. After we change the time, the sun will rise at about 6:35 am. The sun will rise later each morning until the first week in January. Since we will be changing the time, the sun will set earlier in the evening and continue to set earlier until the first week in December.

Jupiter is the bright object high in the sky in the early evening. We passed Jupiter in our orbit on September 21st and we are now moving away from the giant planet. At mid-November, Jupiter will be 408 million miles from earth. Saturn and Venus are now in the morning skies before sunrise. Saturn will be in the evening sky next summer and Venus will be back in the evening sky next fall. Mars and Mercury are too close to the sun for viewing. Cassiopeia, the constellation that looks like a "W", is directly overhead in mid-evening, high above Jupiter. Between Jupiter and Cassiopeia is the giant square of Pegasus. After you locate the "square", go up two stars from the star in the upper left corner of Pegasus and look above that star (Mirach) with binoculars. You should see an elongated fuzzy object which is the Andromeda Galaxy. The Andromeda Galaxy is very similar to our Milky Way Galaxy and is 2.25 million light years away. That means you are seeing the galaxy as it appeared 2.25 million year ago! To the east is Taurus the Bull with the bright star Aldebaran. You need a telescope to see the Crab Nebula in Taurus. It is a cloud that is the remnants of a star that exploded in 1054 and was recorded by the Chinese and Arab astronomers. The bright star near the southern horizon is Fomalhaut. Fomalhaut is the first star astronomers found to have planets orbiting it. The Summer Triangle of Deneb, Vega, and Altair are still in the western sky after sunset. And if you venture out in the late evening, the mighty and easily recognized constellation of Orion will be on the eastern horizon. More about Orion next month.

One of the best meteor showers of the year is the Leonids and it peaks on the 17th. Unfortunately, the full moon is on the 21st and will interfere with meteor viewing. The best viewing will be early in the morning (3:00 am) on the 18th. The moon will have set and the constellation of Leo is high in the sky. The meteors seem to radiate from Leo, which has the bright star, Regulus. The meteors are from Comet Temple-Tuttle.

This month's public shows at the Trackman Planetarium:

November 4th at 6:30 pm - "We Go To The Moon". A children's show on what it would be like to go to the moon, and the children decide what they would have to bring with them.

November 9th at 7:30 pm - "The Winter Skies". A general audience show on what is in the sky for astronomy enthusiasts during the winter.

November 18th at 6:30 pm - "The Winter Skies". Same show as above but presented for younger astronomy enthusiasts.

November 23rd at 7:30 pm - "How to Buy a Telescope". Are you planning on buying a telescope for a gift this season, or for yourself? This show describes how telescopes work and how to purchase a good telescope. (Hint: If the box says how many magnifying power the telescope has - don't buy it!)

Weather permitting, all the public shows are followed with an outdoor tour of the sky.

Call Christine at 815-280-NOVA(6682) between 7:00 am and 12:30 pm for more information or to schedule a show, or send me an e-mail at the address listed below.

The time for the Discover JJC Open House on November 6th has been changed to 9:00 am until noon. The Discover JJC Open House is a great time for prospective students and their parents to visit the main campus and learn about the college. Be sure to stop by the planetarium for a brief show on the winter sky.

I hope you and your families have a happy and safe Thanksgiving.

Art Maurer
Director -Trackman Planetarium at Joliet Junior College
(amaurer@jjc.edu)