

Moon.

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DISCOVER CONNECTICUT'S *STAK* POWER

Take in the stars, planets and the moon at these planetariums and observatories.

By Valerie A. Russo

In the 1960s, the Apollo astronauts trained in planetariums to learn celestial navigation. Today, planetariums and astronomical observatories around the country offer public tours of the night sky, showing planets in the solar system and galaxies light years away.

And in Connecticut, more than a dozen sites – museums, science centers, universities and observatories – offer public stargazing programs. Some sites have a planetarium theater, a round space with a high ceiling where the public can see simulated stars and take an imaginary trip through space. Other sites have an observatory building, platform or roof where the public can view celestial objects in the night sky with the observatory's telescopes. And some sites have both a planetarium and an observatory.

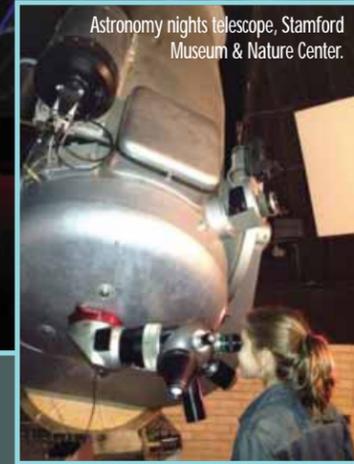
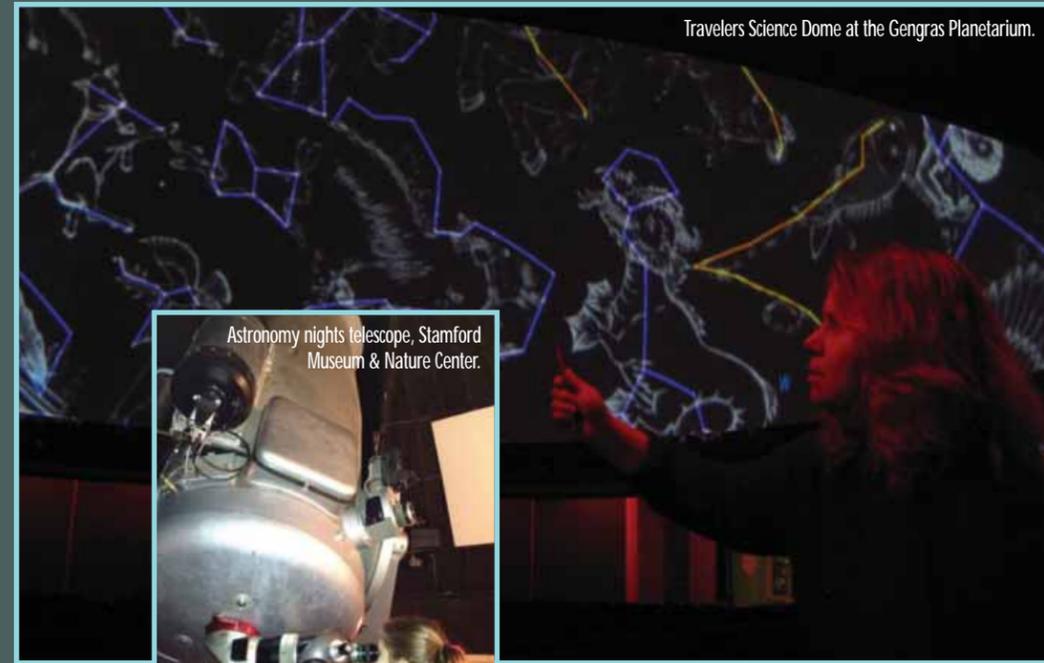
Here is a list of some places where you can tilt your head back and take in the night sky.

Contact all sites before you go in case viewing sessions are canceled due to cloudy weather.

MUSEUMS AND SCIENCE CENTERS

The Travelers Science Dome at the Gengras Planetarium at The New Children's Museum in West Hartford offers a rotating variety of programs for families with young children. In November and December, the planetarium schedule includes two seasonal presentations: Lars the little Polar Bear and an animated holiday show with Christmas music. Don't miss From the Blue Planet to the Red Planet, a full dome planetarium program about the journey from Earth to Mars produced by planetarium staff with a grant from NASA.

The Henry B. duPont III Planetarium at the Discovery Museum in Bridgeport offers a trip to the moon with Sesame Street characters (One World, One Sky), a race to the moon



UNIVERSITY PLANETARIUMS AND OBSERVATORIES

Leitner Family Observatory and Planetarium at Yale University in New Haven is open to the public for planetarium shows on Sunday afternoons and Tuesday evenings, except during Yale's winter break. On Tuesday evenings, visitors also can view the night sky through two permanently mounted telescopes – a computer-controlled reflector telescope and the historic eight-inch Reed refractor telescope, which was purchased in 1882 to study the transit of Venus across the face of the sun.

Public nights at **Western Connecticut State University Observatory** in Danbury are held on Saturdays, usually every other week, during the university's spring and fall terms. The public program starts around sunset with a one-hour planetarium show (which involves a description of objects in the night sky for the season and a question-and-answer session with the observatory director) followed by a viewing of the heavens through the recently renovated 20-inch Ritchey-Chrétien reflector telescope.

On the first and third Saturdays of the month, **Copernican Observatory and Planetarium** at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain offers planetarium shows followed by night sky observation through telescopes.

Public stargazing events are hosted throughout the academic year at **Olin Observatory** at

by international teams (Back to the Moon for Good) and other children's programs.

Several planetariums, including the **Gengras Planetarium**, the **duPont Planetarium** and the **Treworgy Planetarium** at Mystic Seaport in Mystic, offer live tours of the night sky, showing visitors how to locate and identify the stars, planets and constellations at the time of their visit. The live tour at the Treworgy Planetarium explains how to use the stars for navigation, an important skill for sailors in the 19th century.

On selected Friday nights, the **Observatory at the Stamford Museum & Nature Center** in Stamford gives an astronomy presentation, followed by a viewing of the night sky through a 22-inch research grade telescope. Typical subjects for observing are planets, double stars, planetary nebulae, galaxies and Iridium flares.

Once a NIKE missile radar site, **Talcott Mountain Science Center** at the top of Talcott Mountain in Avon offers views of the night sky during monthly public sky-gazing programs in the Alan L. Bean Hypospherium, the largest teaching planetarium in the state.

High-powered reflector telescopes available to sky-gazers include a 16-inch Meade, a 17-inch Dobsonian for deep sky viewing, a 12.5-inch Tinsley and several 8-inch and 10-inch Cassegrains.

Treworgy Planetarium at Mystic Seaport.



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Connecticut College in New London, which has a 20-inch Ritchey–Chrétien reflector telescope.

Van Vleck Observatory at Wesleyan University in Middletown offers three public star-gazing programs. During the academic year, there's Rain or Shine Space Nights for high schoolers and older on Wednesday nights, and Kids' Nights on the first and third Fridays of the month. Year-round, the Astronomical Society of Greater Hartford hosts public observation sessions once a month, on a Saturday.

Three or four times a semester, the **Robert K. Wickware Planetarium** at Eastern Connecticut State University in Willimantic hosts public starshows, which begin with a planetarium show and end with a viewing of the night sky through telescopes.

OTHER OBSERVATORIES

New Pond Farm Astronomy Observatory, part of an environmental education center with a working farm in Redding, offers public sky-gazing on one Saturday evening per month—either slightly before or slightly after the first quarter moon—when there are great shadows on the moon, providing dramatic views.

The observatory's two main telescopes, set on a wooden platform at the top of a hill, are Schmidt Cassegrain reflectors. The large mirrors focus the

light, allowing visitors to see some celestial objects with detail and see objects deep in the night sky, such as star clusters and galaxies.

Operated by the Westport Astronomical Society, **Rolnick Observatory** in Westport offers public stargazing on Wednesday nights. In the dome observatory is the 12.5-inch Newtonian reflector telescope. Set on the lawn is the newly upgraded 25-inch Obsession reflector, the largest telescope in Connecticut available to the public.

Bowman Observatory in Greenwich, operated by the Astronomical Society of Greenwich, is open to the public on the first and third Wednesdays of every month for night sky viewing with the new 16-inch computer-controlled Ritchey–Chrétien reflector telescope.

On the second Saturday of the month, the **John J. McCarthy Observatory** in New Milford offers an astronomy program, followed by viewing of the night sky through the observatory's 16-inch telescope and smaller telescopes.

The **Dorrit Hoffleit Memorial Observatory** at White Memorial Conservation Center in Litchfield, maintained jointly by the Mattatuck and Litchfield astronomy clubs, offers 10 public star parties each year. Each star party includes an astronomy lecture, followed by observation through a 17.5-inch reflector telescope, which has computerized controls. ■