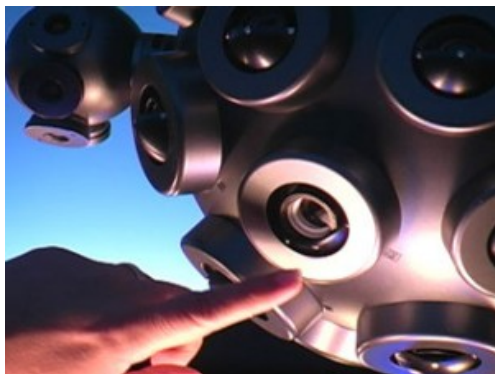


UNK celebrates opening of new planetarium

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By SARA GIBONEY Hub Staff Writer | 0 comments



KEARNEY - Friday was a day of celebration for students, faculty and community members at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Almost 100 people gathered near the entrance to the new planetarium at the Bruner Hall of Science to celebrate the opening of the facility.

"All in all this is truly a day for celebration," said Jose Mena-Werth, professor of physics and physical science and planetarium director.

The 60-seat planetarium, which opened Jan. 15, replaced an older facility located in the basement of Bruner Hall and was part of the a \$14.5 million renovation of the building.

Mena-Werth thanked his father for taking him to his first planetarium show 50 years ago.

"As we watched the show, I hung on every word," he said. "From a future astronomer that's absolutely true."

Mena-Werth played an integral role in the development of the planetarium.

"It's the universal question and it's a great question to ask today. Why? Why do we come and celebrate something like the planetarium? I think it's based on this. The mission of the university is based on three things - one is teaching, the other is research and the third is service," Chancellor Doug Kristensen said. "This planetarium hits all the great things of those three legs of what the university does."

Mena-Werth said the planetarium is used to teach physical sciences, earth sciences, meteorology, physics and astronomy classes.

"This opens doors for teaching and research that didn't exist before," said Charles Bicak, senior vice chancellor for academic and student affairs.

Area kindergarten to 12th grade students, YRTC, community organizations and other groups also visit the facility throughout the year, he said.

"For a few moments, you can look at the stars and think about life in general and think about the big picture of things. Now we're going to be able to do that and for a few minutes lean back and look at the stars and ask those questions: why and how? And that's really what the university is all about. Is the opportunity to ask how and why and what some of those answers really are," Kristensen said.

Naomi Hastings, a physics education major from Oxford, addressed the crowd on behalf of students who use the facility.

"Our new planetarium is a great learning tool," she said. "It will definitely benefit not only the students of UNK, but the surrounding communities for now and far into the foreseeable future. Be sure to step in and see one of Nebraska's most beautiful natural resources, the night sky in the middle of the day."

A \$600,000 NASA grant helped fund the new planetarium, which features a state-of-the-art projector, the Zeiss Skymaster ZKP4.

Sen. Ben Nelson helped to secure the grant.

"This planetarium is the perfect example of the kind of partnership you can put together," he said.

Nelson said public and private partnerships are important for the advancement of Nebraska communities.

Nelson, Mena-Werth, Hastings and other students cut a ribbon to signify the official opening of the planetarium.

Current shows at the planetarium are "Planetarium on Parade" and "Star Stories."

"Planetarium on Parade" takes a behind-the-scenes look at the new planetarium. The audience discovers how the projectors and sound system are used to produce a star show.

"Star Stories" deals with the stories of constellations. The Northern and Southern Hemisphere constellations are explored.

Architects Clark Enersen Partners of Lincoln and builders Beckenhauer Construction of Norfolk completed the project.