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Media Relations

September 6, 2012

New England Fall Astronomy Festival Brings the Moon and the Stars to UNH Sept. 21 – 22



DURHAM, N.H. – Astronomers of all ages and experiences will gather at the University of New Hampshire for lectures, demonstrations, games, crafts

and, of course, observing, at the second annual New England Fall Astronomy Festival Friday, Sept. 21 and Saturday, Sept. 22, 2012. The festival, hosted by the UNH physics department in partnership with the New Hampshire Astronomical Society and organized and staffed by professional and amateur astronomers from throughout the region, is at the UNH Observatory on Spinney Lane in Durham.

“We had so much success with the first New England Fall Astronomy Festival last year we decided to try to make it bigger and better this year. We've done our best to expand the festival to include more activities for kids and their families. We feel that NEFAF is a perfect example of UNH's commitment to its responsibility to the engage the community and provide educational opportunities and outreach to families and citizens in the Seacoast region and beyond,” says organizer Ian Cohen, a Ph.D. student in physics at UNH and manager of the UNH Observatory.

The New England Fall Astronomy Festival, which runs from 6 p.m. to midnight Friday, Sept. 21 and 10 a.m. to midnight Saturday, Sept. 22, is free and open to the public.

The festival opens with a keynote talk by renowned astronomer Alex Filippenko, professor of astronomy at the University of California at Berkeley, at 7:30 p.m. One of the world's most highly cited astronomers, Filippenko will speak about “Dark Energy and the Runaway Universe.” Known to many for his appearances on The History Channel program The Universe, Filippenko is an elected member of the National Academy of Sciences and the winner of numerous science awards as well as the most prestigious teaching award at Berkeley and the Carl Sagan Prize for Science Popularization. Following his talk, which is targeted to adults, the UNH Observatory and additional telescopes will be available for nighttime viewing.

Saturday brings a full roster of family-friendly events, including plenty of activities to engage budding young astronomers. Running from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., children's activities include crafts, demonstrations, and hands-on activities aimed at teaching children about the Sun, moon, stars, and solar system. An inflatable planetarium-style dome will show two rotating children's shows; the UNH LunaCats team will demonstrate its lunar mining robot; hands-on activities will include making a sundial and moon-phase clock. Local astronomy enthusiasts will host the popular “how to pick a telescope” workshops again this year.

In addition, amateur and professional astronomers from around the region will bring telescopes for solar and nighttime observing, giving participants the opportunity to experience a range of telescope types and sizes. Demonstrations and introductions to the night sky for beginners and storytelling and myths will augment evening observing sessions. More details and program updates are at physics.unh.edu/observatory/NEFAF or on the festival's Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/NEFAF.UNH>) or blog (<http://nefaf.wordpress.com>).

Food will be available for sale on site, and free parking is available nearby (see information here: <http://physics.unh.edu/observatory/NEFAF/FAQs>).

In addition to the UNH physics department and the New Hampshire Astronomical Society, the New England Fall Astronomy Festival is sponsored by the offices of the president and provost at UNH, the Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans and Space at UNH, and BAE Systems, Beswick Engineering, the Boston Red Sox, Unutil, and Vixen Optics.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

Photographs available to download:

<http://unh.edu/news/releases/2012/sept/Filippenko.jpg>

Caption: Renowned astronomer Alex Filippenko, professor of astronomy at the University of California at Berkeley, will be the keynote speaker at the New England Fall Astronomy Festival at UNH Friday, Sept. 21, 2012.

<http://unh.edu/news/releases/2012/sept/astronomy.jpg>

Caption: At the first New England Fall Astronomy Festival at UNH (2011), New Hampshire Astronomical Society members brought a fleet of telescopes to introduce astronomers of all ages to observing the sun and stars. Inside the dome is the Observatory's 14-inch reflector. Credit: Kristi Donohue, EOS.

<http://unh.edu/news/releases/2012/sept/child.jpg>

Caption: A young astronomer-to-be looks at the Sun through a solar telescope at the first New England Fall Astronomy Festival in 2011. Credit: Loni Anderson.

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