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Stargaze Saturday at TMC

Telescopes open for public viewing

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CRESTVIEW HILLS - The public is invited to come see the stars at Thomas More College. No, not the George Clooney kind, but the Big Dipper variety.

The Bank of Kentucky Observatory is opening at 6 p.m. Saturday for a free open house.

The event will start with a lecture and introduction in the Science Lecture Hall, followed by telescope viewing.

Built in 2003, the observatory has four telescopes. Three have 10-inch mirrors and one has an 8-inch mirror.

"While these are relatively small telescopes, they still provide great views of the planets, the moon and some bright nebulae and galaxies," said Dr. Wes Ryle, assistant professor in the department of math and physics. "For many who have never used a telescope before, the views are quite stunning."

Ryle said the observatory welcomes anyone with the slightest interest in astronomy.

"Many attendees are families with small children that have never used a telescope before, but there are usually a wide variety of age groups represented," said Ryle. "We seek anyone with a natural curiosity about the night sky and encourage lots of questions about any topic they may have on their mind."

Ryle said the telescopes are used for teaching, public outreach and undergraduate research.

"The cameras and equipment available allow users to conduct research at the same level as many graduate institutions," said Ryle. "I intend to use the telescopes to monitor brightness changes in the cores of very bright, distant galaxies called active galactic nuclei. The brightness of these objects is believed to be produced by an enormous black hole gobbling up material at the center of the galaxy."

Ryle said one senior physics major, Ryan Sketch, just completed a two-year research project using the telescopes.

The project involved the "measurement of the very small motion of a star across the sky," said Ryle.

"These measurements also allowed Ryan to estimate the distance to this star. He recently presented his findings at the annual meeting of the Kentucky Academy of Science held at the University of Kentucky."

Ryle said he has planned open houses once a month. Future dates are Dec. 6 and Jan. 31 at 6 p.m.

Lecture topics include science fiction versus scientific fact, black holes and lunar exploration. For information, call 859-344-3367.
