

JMU SEARCH FOR STARS RETURNS

Posted: March 23, 2015

By **AMELIA BRUST**

HARRISONBURG — Light pollution persists in the Valley, and as a result, so do the efforts of the John C. Wells Planetarium at James Madison University.

The facility's staff will launch the second annual Starry Nights week on Tuesday, with a series of events designed to raise awareness of light pollution and its environmental and health effects.

The problem comes from an overabundance of artificial light in the environment that not only makes it difficult to see the night sky but also disrupts the natural world, according to the National Park Service.

Shanil Virani, planetarium director and assistant professor of physics, and Paul Bogard, a JMU English professor and author of the book "The End of Night: Searching for Natural Darkness in an Age of Artificial Light," are leading the events once again.

This year, Starry Nights is spreading to other cities in the Valley, which Virani said was always the campaign's intention. He will visit Mary Baldwin College in Staunton on Thursday, while Bogard will travel to Washington and Lee University in Lexington on Wednesday, followed by a stop at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville on Friday.

"It has to be a local grass-roots effort," Virani said. "People in those communities need to take ownership."

In Harrisonburg, the planetarium will screen the 2011 documentary "The City Dark" Tuesday from 7 to 10 p.m. The screening will follow an 11-minute full-dome film produced by JMU student Daniel Stein, who photographed the light pollution on campus and in George Washington National Forest over the past year.

Starry Nights also will host a public star party in the astronomy park behind the physics and chemistry building on Carrier Drive. It takes place from 7 to 10 p.m. Friday.

On March 28, the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum on University Boulevard will host nighttime educational activities and guided walks starting at 7 p.m. The event culminates with the marking of Earth Hour from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m., when people around the world turn out their lights in order to raise awareness of climate change.

For more information about Starry Nights go to www.jmu.edu/planetarium/starrynights.shtml.

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