

CTPA Visit to Adler Planetarium

March 13, 2012

A message from the CTPA President, Donna Primas

For several years CTPA has kept attendance statistics, which include noting when people RSVP and then cancel at the last minute or simply NO SHOW.

The visit to Adler was the most recent disappointing example of a lack of professionalism by CTPA members. Everyone has a transportation problem, family emergency or even a last minute job, which could prevent attendance from time to time. But, as with most things in life, how a person responds when things happen is truly a measure of their mettle.

The CTPA Officers believe that you should **treat CTPA events like a job** and afford the organization the same courtesy you would extend to an EMPLOYER. When something happens and you are booked for a JOB, do you call or email several days in advance when you know or suspect your plans may change? Do you wait until you get a job reminder email or phone call? Or do you just not show up and never communicate the reasons?

Very regrettably, 25% of the people who RSVPed to attend the Adler event cancelled, or worse “No Showed”, in the final 24 hours before the event. This is particularly embarrassing when we have communicated the number of attendees to our hosts and they have reserved tickets or services and/or provided refreshments for us.

This is a problem that reflects on the professionalism of the organization and its members. One less person is not a big deal, but more than ten less—YIKES!

What future steps do YOU think CTPA should take? The CTPA officers hope that the situation improves and that we don't have to consider charging a refundable fee to more fully insure attendance at these “free” educational events. Of course an easier alternative would be to not schedule cost saving group field trips at all.

Thirty-six CTPA-ers toured Adler Planetarium on a surprisingly warm and sunny March afternoon. For those who wished they had been outside on the lakefront path instead of inside a museum, the trade-off was worth the effort. For the not insignificant number of those who reserved but did not attend, **YOU MISSED A TERRIFIC TOUR.** Think what it will cost you to enter on your own – minimally \$28 with the Deep Space Adventure Pass which is the only way to see that new sky show. Plus, you wouldn't likely have a veteran astronomer show you the highlights on tour the way we did.

By the way, the Adler is the only astronomical museum in the world with TWO domes under its roof. And also by the way, I nearly typed “astrologer” instead of “astronomer.” As a tour guide, I always point out the **signs of the zodiac** all around the exterior of the Adler, since many people think astrology is a lot of hoey, but there it is – decorating this renowned scientific museum.



Our CTPA group was greeted by **Mara Sullivan**, Advanced Sales Coordinator, who enjoys helping to arrange glamorous benefit parties as well as corralling family and children at overnight events. One night earlier this month, the museum hosted 450 at a sleepover! (Think Boy Scouts.) Mara gave us “members” stickers to wear, which we showed to get complimentary timed tickets to enter the vortex (LEFT) to see the terrific new **Deep Space Adventure** in the Grainger Sky Theater, as well as the sky show in **Undiscovered Worlds** in the Definiti Space Theater. I did see both the under-dome presentations. In the Definiti Theater is “Undiscovered Worlds,” a factual summary of recent discoveries of **exoplanets** or “planets that orbits a star in a solar system other than that of Earth” while Deep Space Adventure is an eye-appealing computer generated graphics tale of science-fiction based on some known facts.

Before entering the Deep Space Adventure with timed tickets, guests wait in a futuristic space created out of overarching fabric and videos with images of astronauts and cosmologists talking, and space ships floating (RIGHT). Upon entry, music rises and a voice like “Hal” straight out of “2001 A Space Odyssey” welcomes guests, advising that he is from far away. Very far away. Upon exiting the show there are

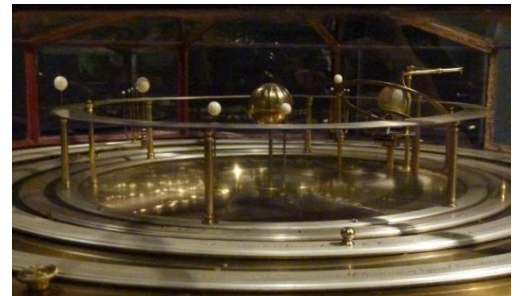




explanations about the Deep Space Adventure about how much of the animation comes from real science. The show “takes you aboard the observation deck of a futuristic starship where you will be surrounded by the larger-than-life phenomena of our dynamic Universe.” Indeed, it’s quite spectacular with graphics and mood music and narration (LEFT). I especially liked the cosmic collisions!

Astronomer Larry Ciupik (“ku-pic”) guided two CTPA groups and provided an interesting, fast paced and fascinating commentary. Not only did he exhibit enthusiasm and use easy words, but he talked loudly and directly to his audience, a feat many tour guides have not mastered! Kudos to Larry for this. It was surprising to learn he’s been with the Adler for 40 years, as he has a youthful appearance. Here are a few notes from the speedy walk-through with Astronomer Larry Ciupik:

- Right away we noticed he pronounced Uranus as UR-an-us (short a). He reminded us that he is a college professor, and if he used the ur-ANE-us pronunciation, the audience and time would be lost in juvenile joking. Both pronunciations are correct.
- We toured a glassed-in area open to the public only from 12-1pm and 2-3pm because it is a “testing area” where scientists work. Viewing part of the space uses 3-D glasses but we didn’t have time to enjoy that.
- In an area devoted to ancient astronomy sites, we viewed a Grand Orrery (OAR-er-ee), (RIGHT) named after The Fourth Earl of Orrery in England, made for King George III in 1781, Wikipedia defines an **orrery** as “a mechanical device that illustrates the relative positions and motions of the planets and moons in the Solar System in a heliocentric model.” This teaching tool was enclosed in a glass topped table and showed the *Georgiam Sidus*, or “King George Star”, a.k.a. Uranus, discovered and so named by a scientist named Sir William Herschel and his sister (who never got recognition). Basically this orrery shows the earth being orbited by planets. Sculpturally speaking, it’s beautiful, with the signs of the zodiac all around.
- Like most great museums, here only **12% of the Adler’s collections are on display**. We learned that much of the exhibits are underground, in spaces created that way because the museum figured the City of Chicago would not like to see a great big building created on the lakefront alongside the historic art deco 1930 structure. But along came the glassy, curved addition to the Shedd Aquarium, and the Adler figured it could also add space outside and above ground. **Architect Dirk Lohan’s** office was responsible for both gorgeous Shedd and Adler glass surrounds, and our guide told us that Lohan is also a trustee of the planetarium.
- Viewing an early Gemini 2-man space capsule (RIGHT), we learned that early astronauts were the ones who insisted on windows so they could see the earth (and anything else) while they were trapped in a claustrophobic space together for as long as a week. Larry showed us where a part of the exterior outer curved capsule “bottom” layer (made of ceramic beads) was burned away upon reentry to the earth from the incredible heat. This capsule hosted famous astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Jim Lovell.
- Astronaut Dave Scott in Apollo 15 brought back moon rocks – the Great Scott Rock 1971 – and the Adler has a bit of it, which we saw.
- **John Grunsfeld** took classes at the Adler as a kid, and became an astronaut with a particular claim to fame. His father was a very well known architect on the North Shore, and his architect grandfather designed the Adler Planetarium! It is really fun to point out that Grunsfeld-the-astronaut’s grandfather created this magnificent art deco structure, carved out of glorious wavy greenish granite into a 12-sided temple to astronomy, decorated on each of the 12 sides with signs of the zodiac sculpted by none other than **Alfonso Ianelli**.



- The Adler has a piece of a rock that came from a giant asteroid which hit what is now the Arizona desert about 50,000 years ago. We viewed a photograph of a vast crater it created way back then, and Larry explained that when the rock hit the earth, it basically exploded and threw up debris all around which became the sides of the crater.
- More recently, a “messenger from Mars” landed in somebody’s house in Park Forest. The homeowners called the police first, their insurance agent second, and Larry third. Astronomers headed south and scoured the landscape for pieces of the planet Mars, and found at police HQ a tableful of debris, and out in Olympia Fields somewhere along Route 30, the Adler sample. Larry says we know it’s from Mars because we’ve measured the atmosphere of the planet, and then measured the atmosphere of an air bubble in the found rock and they are the same, having basically a “fingerprint of gases.”
- Larry talked about mass extinctions and great changes on earth and elsewhere caused by outer space “collisions,” while we stood in a sunny area of the museum underneath gigantic replicas of planets orbited by whatever orbits planets. He told us that the earth itself is tilted, because of a collision sometime in the vastly distant past. He pointed to the planet Uranus (a “dwarf” planet) which in the display overhead was orbited vertically instead of horizontally like the other planets.
- We asked Larry about why the Adler wasn’t a recipient of one of the several space shuttles available for display from the federal government, which you may recall reading about some time ago. In order to display such a thing, a museum would require an entire new building, and that’s kind of costly. Chicago’s Adler will get a simulator, which is pretty cool. We won’t be able to “use” it, or sit in it or whatever, but we will see it and learn from it, once the money is forthcoming to acquire and display it.



There is so much this museum offers. I encourage everyone to check out the Adler’s website for unusual special events: www.adlerplanetarium.org. Of all the student tours I’ve had the pleasure to accompany in the last several years, most of them visit No. 1, the Shedd Aquarium, and No. 2, the Field Museum, and sometimes the Museum of Science & Industry. Rarely do groups schedule the Adler, and I think it is a museum that many tour groups should reconsider.

For adults, each month the museum hosts “Adler After Dark,” where guests enjoy cocktails and entertainment framed by Chicago’s skyline view. “After Hours Science” activities and demonstrations are available, along with the opportunity to see Saturn’s rings or Jupiter’s great red spot using Adler’s telescopes, including the Doane Observatory telescope, the largest in the Midwest accessible to the public.

Many CTPA guides are familiar with the history of this great museum, and our own Encyclopedia of Chicago says it best:

The Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum was conceived in 1928 on a visit to Europe by Max Adler, a retired executive with Sears, Roebuck & Co. There he saw the newly invented Zeiss planetarium projector, which reproduced the night sky with unparalleled accuracy inside a domed theater. Upon his return, he donated a Zeiss projector to the people of Chicago, with money to build an edifice to house it. The landmark 12-sided building that resulted was designed by Ernst Grunsfeld and opened in 1930 on a small island connected to the shore by a causeway. It was the first modern planetarium in the Western Hemisphere. During the Century of Progress Exhibition (1933–34) a million and a half people visited the planetarium and museum.

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