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A large crowd gathered at Moline Public Library on Aug. 21, 2017, to observe the solar eclipse. PAC plans to hold another public observing event for the solar eclipse on April 8. (Photo courtesy of Moline Public Library)

Join the PAC on skywatch

Check out the solar eclipse in April and learn about space with the Popular Astronomy Club



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Popular Astronomy Club

From its founding in 1936, the Popular Astronomy Club has basically had a two-part mission.

PAC serves as a place where those interested in amateur astronomy can get together with like-minded individuals in order to learn from one another, and to participate in activities such as observing and astrophotography.

Along with being a community of amateur astronomers, though, PAC also shares its passion for astronomy with the entire community in the Quad-Cities and surrounding area. Public outreach has always been part of what PAC does, and the club has, for nearly nine decades now, held observing sessions and other presentations that are open to anyone who wants to see what's up in the night sky, and who wants to know more about what lies beyond our home planet.

The numbers show that public

outreach was a large part of what PAC did in 2023. During the year just past, PAC held 47 public outreach activities, which were attended by a total of 1,793 people. Both totals are up slightly from 2022, a year when the world slowly returned to "normal" in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

PAC's best-known and best-attended public outreach activities are probably the monthly observing sessions held at Niabi Zoo on the third Saturday of every month from March through November. A few of those sessions in 2023 were cancelled or postponed due to uncooperative weather, but those that were held usually attracted large, enthusiastic crowds.

Mark your calendars, as PAC will continue to hold public observing at the zoo during 2024, with the first session of the year scheduled for March 16 and the last slated for Nov. 16.

PAC also held observing sessions and activities at libraries, schools, campgrounds and even an alpaca farm, as well as for scout groups, churches and other organizations.

In keeping with its educational mission, PAC has formed partnerships with John Deere Middle School in Moline and with Moline Public Library. Both JDMS and the library hosted observing sessions and activities during 2023, and will continue to do so this year.

Other groups and organizations have already requested observing sessions for 2024, and more requests are expected. Public interest may be piqued because of a big astronomical event coming this year.

A solar eclipse will occur on April 8. Like the solar eclipse of 2017, the path of totality will cross the United States south and east of the Quad-Cities. In this area, about 90% of the Sun will be

blocked by the shadow of the Moon at the peak, at about 2 p.m. local time.

PAC plans to hold a public eclipse viewing session at the Moline Public Library on the day of the eclipse. A similar viewing session held in 2017 attracted more than 1,000 people. Plan now to attend that session, or to find a place in the path of totality where you can experience one of the most awe-inspiring natural events you'll ever witness.

Club activities include monthly membership meetings held on the second Monday of the month at 7 p.m. at Moline's Butterworth Center. (Meetings are not held in August, when PAC holds its annual picnic, or October, the month of the club's annual banquet.)

These meetings are open to both members and guests, and often include presentations on interesting astronomy-related topics led by subject-matter experts. The advent of Zoom and similar meeting software has enabled PAC to attract speakers who can make presentations from remote locations.

During 2023, PAC meetings included presentations on topics such as the colonization of Mars,

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"extreme" astronomy, and the use of astronomical and scientific instruments on the Santa Fe and Oregon trails.

The presentations already scheduled for 2024 PAC meetings include one on the Tunguska event – a large explosion in Siberia in 1908 likely caused by an asteroid strike – and one

that will be led by the director of the Vatican Observatory.

PAC believes that astronomy is for everyone, which means that membership in the club is open to everyone. You don't need to own a telescope or have any education or background in astronomy. All you need is an interest in astronomy, and a desire to learn and know more.

To learn more about PAC, visit our website, at www.popularastronomyclub.org, or find

us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/QCPAC. To contact PAC, send an email to popularastronomyclub@gmail.com.

The Popular Astronomy Club meets the second Monday of the month at 7 p.m. at the Butterworth Center in Moline. All are welcome to attend. You can also find us on Facebook or visit our website, at <https://www.popularastronomyclub.org>.