CENTRAL ILLINOIS TO ENJOY A HARVEST MOON ECLIPSE

The “harvest Moon” will pass into the shadow of the Earth, resulting in a total lunar eclipse, on Sunday evening, September 27. The event begins just after 8pm and will last until almost 11:30pm. If skies are clear, anyone in the Midwest should be able to see the eclipse from their backyard. Those wanting to see the eclipse through a telescope can visit the William M. Staerkel Planetarium at Parkland College, beginning at 8pm. The CU Astronomical Society will have telescopes set-up outside in bus drop-off drive. Patrons should park in the M-1 lot and walk over.

“Unlike their solar counterparts, lunar eclipse are very safe to observe,” according to David Leake, director of the planetarium. “It is just like looking at a full Moon in the sky but it will appears as if something is taking a bite out of the Moon!”

The Moon will begin to enter the dark part of the Earth’s shadow at 8:07pm. The Moon will be completely inside the Earth’s shadow by 9:11pm. The Moon will begin to emerge from the shadow by 10:23pm and we’ll have a Full Moon back in the night sky by 11:27pm.

There are two interesting facts about this eclipse. First, this eclipsed Full Moon will be the Full Moon closest to the autumn equinox. This Moon is traditionally called the “harvest Moon” and can occur in either September or early October each year. Second, the distance from the Earth to the Moon is not constant and, at times, the Moon is a little closer to our planet than other times. The midpoint of September’s eclipse occurs just 59 minutes after the Moon’s closest approach to the Earth, also called “perigee.” Some have called a full Moon near perigee a “supermoon.”

“If you’re watching the eclipse, there are two things to look for,” says Leake. “The first is the curved shadow of the Earth. In ancient times, this was evidence that the Earth was, in fact, round and not flat. Second, after the eclipse is well underway look for a reddish tint on the Moon. The red is from sunlight that bends through the Earth’s atmosphere. The blue is scattered out, which is why we have blue skies, leaving the red part of the spectrum to strike the Moon.” This is also why sunsets are reddish. Some have called this effect a “blood Moon,” though it has nothing to do with blood and the effect is natural and well understood. The degree of redness will depend on the state of the atmosphere at the time.

There will be two eclipses of the Moon in 2016, though, for each, the Moon will pass through the lighter part of the Earth’s shadow and won’t be easily noticeable. The next total lunar eclipse easily visible from Central Illinois will be in January of 2019.

If the weather isn’t perfect, you may call the CUAS hotline (217.351.2567) to see if the observing event at the planetarium is still occurring.

For more information:
