

# Goldendale Observatory In the Spotlight

*Upcoming eclipse renews public interest in the Goldendale Observatory*

By Jeanie Senior

The Goldendale Observatory found itself in a starring role in February 1979 when a solar eclipse crossed North America and the observatory, in the totality zone, was the designated headquarters for the National Astronomical League.

Fast forward 38 years. Another solar eclipse is right around the corner—August 21—with a coast-to-coast path that starts on the Oregon Coast and moves across central Oregon.

Because Goldendale is slightly north of what astronomers call the Path of Totality, the eclipse will begin there at 9:09 a.m., max out at 97.4 percent at 10:22 a.m., and end at 11:42 a.m.

The skies over Klickitat County will darken. While 97.4 percent sounds pretty close to a total eclipse, “you’d be surprised what that little sliver of the sun can do to the sky,” says Troy Carpenter, interpretive specialist for Goldendale Observatory State Park.

Only with a total eclipse is it possible to see the sun’s corona outlined around the shadow of the moon.

Still, it is anticipated the eclipse will attract a crowd to Goldendale, where the observatory houses what Troy calls one of the world’s largest public telescopes.

Troy says the city of Goldendale, the Goldendale Chamber of Commerce and



**Troy Carpenter has worked at the Goldendale Observatory since May 2013.**

Photos courtesy of Troy Alexander

the state park are discussing plans for something special the night before to celebrate the eclipse. He also envisions training sessions for people who will work with visitors on August 20 and on the day of the eclipse.

Although the observatory is in the midst of an extensive renovation, it will be open August 21. Because of the construction, and to avoid traffic jams, the road to Observatory Hill will be closed. Shuttle buses will transport visitors to the observatory.

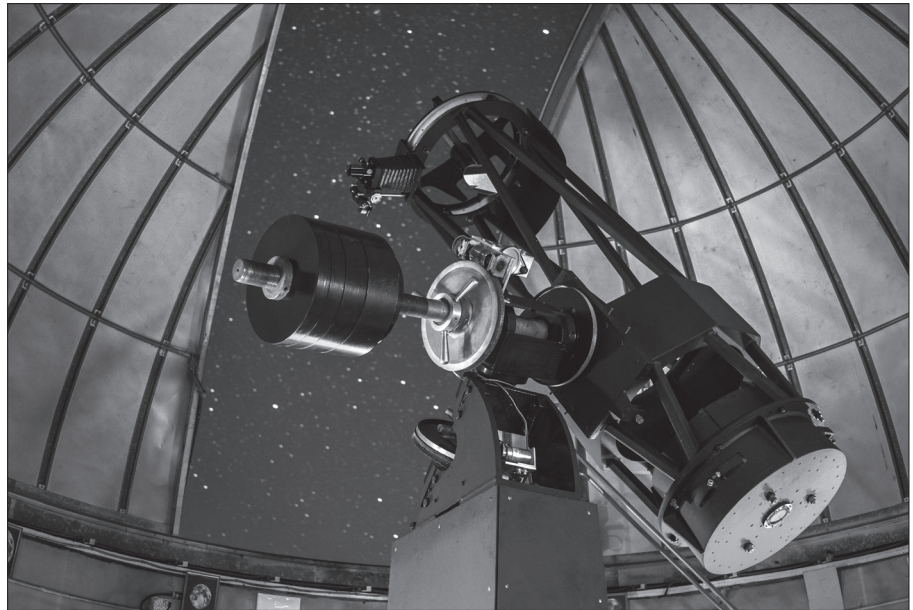
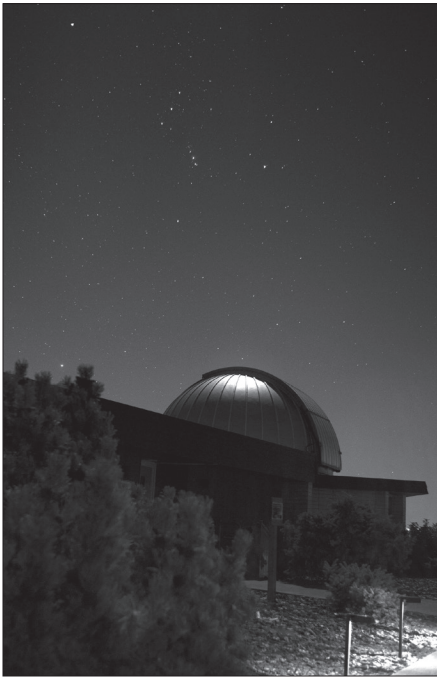
A key part of the ongoing \$2 million

facility upgrade is refurbishing the observatory’s telescope.

“The telescope’s performance will be dramatically improved, with better resolution ... and enormously better contrast,” Troy says.

Removed from its dome last summer, the telescope is expected to be back in place by the time of the eclipse.

As part of the refurbishment, the telescope will get a new mirror. The original 200-pound mirror is 24.5 inches in diameter and 5 inches thick. It is being replaced, but will be displayed in the



**From left, the constellation Orion shines bright above the observatory. One of the major renovations to the observatory includes the large viewing telescope.**

observatory's planned interpretive center.

The mirror will be a monument to the four amateur astronomers from Vancouver who spent more than six years and just \$3,000 designing, building and assembling the enormous telescope—even grinding the glass for the mirror.

Seeking a site with clear skies and little light pollution to locate the telescope, they settled on Goldendale. Donations, a federal grant and a bank loan paid for construction of the observatory.

Dedicated in 1973, it was operated by a nonprofit volunteer organization until 1980, when the 5-acre property was acquired by Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

Troy—who has worked at the observatory since May 2013—says there have been few changes to the facility since it opened. Besides refurbishing the telescope, the current phase of the upgrade included removing a massive chain link fence and replacing it with a new gate, as well as a new sidewalk, new sign and interior exhibits.

The next phase calls for demolishing existing structures except for the south dome and constructing a new, much

larger building linked to the dome, and housing an interpretive center. When construction is complete, Troy says the number of shows could increase from the present two a day to five or even seven.

The expansion, funded by the Washington Legislature, was prompted by the park's growing popularity.

"We've seen a great increase in visitation," Troy says. "I've been interested in astronomy my whole life. It's an all-encompassing science."

His parents gave Troy his first telescope when he was 10 or 11. When he got a better instrument in his early 20s, "that telescope changed my life," he says. "It's rare that you can pinpoint a device that changed your life. I saw the rings of Saturn and that really impressed me."

Before he came to work at the observatory, Troy ran a training center in Philadelphia that taught power generation technology and power generation safety. When the park's longtime interpretive specialist, Steve Stout, decided to retire, Troy applied for the job.

Presentations at the observatory are interactive and people are encouraged to ask questions, Troy says.

"One of the things we've upgraded already is the solar telescope," he notes. "We now have the world's largest mass-produced solar telescopes."

Troy encourages visitors to check the observatory website or call before coming.

"Right now, there's not much to do between shows, something that will not be true by spring of 2018 when exhibits will be finished in the new building," he says.

Even in summer, Troy urges visitors to dress warmly.

"We're at 2,170 foot elevation," he says. "Even in the summer it gets cool at night."

Troy is gratified at the improvements taking place.

"It's exciting to be part of a big renovation," he says.

A keen photographer, Troy has been reveling in the photo opportunities that abound at the observatory.

"Whenever I hear people saying astronomy is boring, I say, 'That's not really possible,'" he says. ■

*For more information about the Goldendale Observatory, events and the upcoming eclipse, go to [www.goldendaleobservatory.com](http://www.goldendaleobservatory.com). Go to [www.goldendalechamber.org](http://www.goldendalechamber.org) for more information about local tourism and the upcoming eclipse.*