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Adler over the moon about Apollo 11 bash

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July 17, 2009

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It took nearly 10 years for the United States to put a man on the moon, once it had resolved to do it. That commitment to investing in science and the future is as much a part of the Adler Planetarium's celebration of the 40th anniversary of Apollo 11's historic journey as anything else.

On July 20, 1969, the Apollo 11 space mission, for the first time in history, landed a couple of astronauts, Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, on the moon's surface. For those who watched the moon landing on television, it likely was a memorable moment in their lives. But many Americans don't remember Apollo 11 (the Apollo manned space-flight program ended in 1972), so they might wonder what all the fuss is about.

"For me, Apollo 11's ultimate legacy is the power of humans to change their environment and leave the planet," says Lucy Fortson, the Adler's vice president for research. "It's proving that we could do it. That first tadpole that came out of the sea and went onto land -- it's the same thing. Apollo 11 was a significant step in our transition into a space-faring species."

This major anniversary allows the Adler to fulfill its mission to help people feel a part of the space program, says Michelle Nichols, the Adler's master educator. She says a revival of the manned space-flight program and new visits to the moon are planned in the next few years.

"We hope that people will come to understand the reasons to go to the moon," she says, adding that while the goal of putting a man on the moon started out as a race against the Soviet Union, "we did good science there."

The Adler has been hosting events all during July to celebrate the anniversary, and something fun and moon-related is on the agenda from 1 to 3 p.m. every day until the end of the month. On Tuesdays, for example, the observatory is open and visitors are able to look at the sun, which has been showing off lately with its most impressive sunspots in a long time. On Thursdays, Adler staffers are recording visitors' thoughts on the Apollo 11 mission. These comments are sparked by a "moon wall" of high-resolution images taken from the Apollo spacecraft.

But the anniversary itself is the big day, with a chocolate cake in the shape of a lunar lander scheduled to be cut at 3:17 p.m., the time when the astronauts touched down on the surface of the moon. The first 175 people to hit the Adler cafe will get a piece of cake for free.

Other fun activities will include making footprints in clay to take home, to commemorate the fact that the astronauts' footsteps probably still are intact in the dust on the moon's surface, as there is no atmosphere to kick up a wind that might blow them away. Staff members will be demonstrating how rockets work, using balloon rockets. A touchable "moon rock," a meteorite found on earth but probably of lunar origin, will be on display from 2 to 3 p.m., and from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., moon-themed space shows are scheduled. Some activities are ticketed events.

It's unusual for the Adler to be open late on a Monday night but visitors will be able to look through telescopes until 10 p.m. on the anniversary.

All the activities are geared to visitors age 5 and up.

"We want kids to come," Nichols says. "The moon is something you can easily see. And it's attainable. We've been there, and we can go back."

ASTRONAUTS IN PERSON

An Evening with Buzz Aldrin and Jim Lovell, with NASA veterans Aldrin

and Jim Lovell, commander of Apollo missions 8 and 13, will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday at Thorne Auditorium, 375 E. Chicago on the Northwestern University campus. Afterward, Aldrin will sign copies of his new book, *Magnificent Desolation: The Long Journey Home from the Moon.* Tickets are $15 and registration is required. Call (312) 322-0332; www.regonline.com/apollo11.

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