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Largest Telescope in Greater Phoenix Arrives in Fountain Hills

State-of-the-art Instrument Ushers in New Era Of Astronomy Access and Education for Arizona

FOUNTAIN HILLS, Ariz. – The International Dark Sky Discovery Center, opening soon in the Town of Fountain Hills, installed the largest telescope in the Greater Phoenix metropolitan area on Sept. 29. The Dark Sky Observatory is the first of four major components to be completed in the discovery center, which will also include a planetarium, theater, and exhibit hall.

"With this telescope, visitors will be able to see planets, galaxies, nebulae, and more in incredible detail," said Dr. Dania Wright, education director, "and since it is fully remotely operable, it will also connect the center to the global scientific community."

The 27.5-inch PlaneWave CDK700 was installed by crane and is equipped with advanced astrophotography cameras. In addition to public viewing, it will be used for both research and education.

"The Center reinforces Arizona's commitment to expanding our understanding of the universe," said Arizona State University President Michael M. Crow, "and we look forward to working with them to advance new research and learning opportunities."

The Dark Sky Observatory anchors the center's broader vision, which includes an advanced planetarium with a tilted dome and immersive digital technology, a 150-seat theater with a 27-foot-wide LED video wall, and an exhibit hall featuring more than 60 interactive and static exhibits about the night sky. With final construction phases underway, the Discovery Center is expected to open in summer 2026.

"Fountain Hills, designated as the 17th International Dark Sky Community in the world, is the perfect location for the Discovery Center and its large telescope," said State Senator John Kavanagh. "With its dark skies and proximity to millions of people, the center will be a national treasure benefiting the entire state of Arizona."

The organization has also built its initial leadership team with three full-time positions; Executive Director Kari Carlisle, Education Director Dania Wright, and Visitor Services Manager Michael Weber.

While $27 million has been raised for the $29 million dollar project, additional funding is needed to support the final furnishing of the Inspiration Theater. Every contribution helps build a world-class facility that will benefit Arizona and the world for generations to come.

"Watching this architectural masterpiece rise from the ground up has been an awesome experience for our town," said Fountain Hills Mayor Gerry Friedel. "The community support for this project is truly amazing, and we can't wait for its opening next summer."

Visit the website at darkskycenter.org to sign up for occasional email updates or to learn about donation options.

For information about the Town of Fountain Hills, please visit FountainHillsAZ.gov and experiencefountainhills.org.

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About the International Dark Sky Discovery Center

The International Dark Sky Discovery Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to establishing and operating a world-class STEM education center in Fountain Hills, Arizona. Its science-based mission is to educate the public about the importance of protecting the vanishing night sky. Children and adults alike will be introduced to the awesome wonders of the cosmos and will leave with a better understanding of the universe and how to protect dark skies for the benefit of all life on Earth. More information, including a narrated 3D flyover of the Discovery Center and support statements from leaders throughout the state, is available at darkskycenter.org.

About the Town of Fountain Hills

Founded in 1970 and incorporated in 1989, today more than 24,000 people call the Town of Fountain Hills home. The Town is located in the northeast portion of the Phoenix Metropolitan Area and is bordered by the McDowell Mountain Regional Park within Maricopa County. The Town's scenic views and desert terrain provide for a wide range of outdoor activities, including hiking, biking, and golf, in support of healthy lifestyles.

Visit www.fountainhillsaz.gov or www.experiencefountainhills.org for more information.

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