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**FIRST OF ITS KIND IN THE WORLD
BRINGING THE HEAVENS TO EARTH EXHIBIT
OPENS AT THE
ADLER PLANETARIUM & ASTRONOMY MUSEUM
MARCH 20, 2002**

Long before the dawn of recorded history the sky was a source of fascination and wonder to early cultures. The observed cycles of the Moon, the Sun's motion across the sky and the movement of the stars and planets influenced daily activities as well as spiritual and communal life.

Incorporating the disciplines of astronomy, cultural history, anthropology and archaeology, the Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum will open a new exhibit, *Bringing the Heavens to Earth: Cultural Astronomies around the World*, on Wednesday, March 20, 2002. Funded by a gift from the C. Paul Johnson Family Charitable Foundation and grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the exhibit boasts a distinguished list of advisors from many disciplines who contributed their expertise to create this intriguing new exhibit.

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Bringing/Add 1

Unlike any other in the world, this exhibit unveils the diversity of the cultures that have contributed various answers to the timeless human quest to understand our place in the Universe and explores the common astronomical threads that bind humanity across culture, geography and time.

Bringing the Heavens to Earth focuses on three primary concepts that resonate throughout the many represented cultures: *Surviving*, *Living in Community* and *Finding Meaning*. Visitors enter the new Johnson Cultural Astronomies Gallery through a “Stonehenge-like” archway and encounter a variety of interesting and fun interactives to help them learn more about selected cultures and how peoples’ relationships with the sky impacted every facet of their lives. In various immersive environments, visitors can play the role of an Assyrian king, a Peruvian peasant or an Egyptian pharaoh, try on costumes that depict individuals from these cultures, and interact with several exhibits.

The *Surviving* concept encompasses many practical purposes for which people once utilized the skies: to provide directional clues for navigation, to hunt and gather food under the light of the full moon and to schedule when to plant and harvest dependent upon the rising and setting of certain stars. A 15-foot seaworthy Polynesian canoe forms the backdrop as visitors are invited to try their hand at navigating the ocean using a red zenith star. Computer projections and an audio track guide them in their attempts to stay on course and make it back to “their” target island safely.

Living in Community expresses the different ways that the observations of the sky formed and shaped political and social lives, influenced the design of homes, public places, cities and empires and also provided structure and order in the form of calendars and time pieces. To illustrate this point, visitors can sit on a model of an Assyrian throne and become “king for a day” to determine whether a lunar eclipse will bring the end of the monarch’s reign.

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Bringing/Add 2

Throughout history humankind has looked to the sky to ponder the eternal query, “What is our place in the Universe?” *Finding Meaning* explores how ancient people saw the cycles of their own lives - birth, life and death, as a reflection of the cycles that they observed in the heavens. They saw the sky as the home of their gods and goddesses and created myths to explain the origins of the Universe, the Earth and themselves. Their ceremonies and rituals were outgrowths of their attempts to “tap into” cosmic power, appease the anger of gods or simply reinforce civic and religious order within the community. In this area of the exhibit, visitors can help the Egyptian pharaoh’s spirit reach its celestial destiny by manipulating a translucent tabletop pyramid model that reveals its interior shafts. By turning the pyramid to align the shafts properly to the pole star the “spirit” of the pharaoh is released to the Imperishable Stars, which the Egyptians believed symbolized eternal life.

In awarding the Adler a grant in the amount of \$250,000, the National Endowment for the Humanities described the exhibit as “intellectually solid and compelling in the way it bridges the gap effectively between the sciences and the humanities.” They called the exhibit proposal impressive, showing great thought and planning in its scholarship and in its attention to the visitor experience. This year, NEH awarded funding to only 23 museums and historical organizations; as an indicator of their high regard for this exhibit, they requested an electronic version of our grant proposal to keep on hand as a sample and a model for future applicants.

In addition to the opening of *Bringing the Heavens to Earth*, the Adler will also debut a new Sky Theater show, “Skywatchers of Africa,” on the same day. “Skywatchers” leads visitors on an exciting exploration of Africa and its peoples’ captivating cultural uses of the sky over thousands of years. Elaborating on the themes of

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Bringing/Add 3

the new exhibit, “Skywatchers” highlights the diversity of African cultural astronomy and celebrates our shared human experience.

The exhibit will officially open with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 11:00 a.m. on March 20, 2002. In honor of the premiere of the “Skywatchers of Africa,” S.P.I.R.I.T.S. SOA, Inc., a Chicago based research and arts organization, will entertain visitors with an enlightening and thrilling performance of ethnic drumming, stilt-walking and masquerade.

Saturday, March 23 and Sunday, March 24 will celebrate Mexico’s many contributions to science of astronomy with two fun-filled days of family activities, demonstrations and performances. Children will be able to make a sun mask, learn about Mayan math and hear sky tales based upon Mayan and Mexican myths.

Adults can dance the night away at Luna Cabana on Saturday, March 23rd when the lakefront will sizzle with a mix of hot Latin music, dance instruction, food and drinks with a tropical flair. Free dance instruction will be available. Cover charge is \$12 per person, \$10 for Adler members.

ADLER GENERAL INFORMATION

Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum hours:

9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

On the first Friday of each month the Adler offers special programs with extended hours from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Regular Admission:

Ultimate Universe Adventure is \$16.00 for adults, \$15.00 for seniors 65 and older and \$14.00 for children 4 – 17.

This package includes admission and the choice of two sky shows.

Galaxy Passport is \$13.00 for adults, \$12.00 for seniors 65 and older and \$11.00 for children 4 – 17. This package includes admission and choice of sky shows.

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Bringing/ Add 4

The Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum is the first planetarium in the Western Hemisphere. Its astronomy programs have reached over 40 million people during the past 72 years. Nine state-of-the-art exhibition galleries located in the stunning new Sky Pavilion and the recently renovated landmark 1930s building present modern space exploration along with the

history of astronomy. The world's first StarRider™ Theater, the most technologically advanced, audience-interactive planetarium, fuels the imagination of visitors during virtual flights through the cosmos. With a staff of over 200, the Adler pursues its mission to present the human quest to better understand the universe. Adler scientists and historians, who hold joint appointments at the University of Chicago and Northwestern University, are working at the forefront of research in astronomy and its fascinating history. The Adler is leading the way into the new "Space Millennium."

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL (312) 922-STAR
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www.adlerplanetarium.org.**

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