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CONTACT: Dawn Kappel
Director of External Communications
312-322-0524

Diana L. Holic
Public Relations Coordinator
312-322-0548

Skywatchers of Africa
Premieres at the
Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum

More than three times the size of the United States, Africa is home to 700 million people living in over 50 countries and speaking nearly 2,000 languages. Many African cultures, both past and present, link human affairs to the secrets and mysteries of the heavens through customs, traditions and ceremonies. A new show, *Skywatchers of Africa*, premiering on March 20th, 2002 at the Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum invites guests to travel throughout Africa and across time to participate in these traditions, and celebrate the astronomy of their cultures.

In the Adler's historic Sky Theater, visitors witness the clear night skies of Africa, learning how its peoples used their astronomical observations to help them grow food, tell time, find their way through harsh lands, and mold their spiritual lives. From generation to generation, since the beginning of human experience, Africans have passed down their diverse beliefs and traditions featuring important connections with the heavens. *Skywatchers of Africa* illustrates several cultures from across the African Continent and highlights their relationships with the cosmos.

Skywatchers takes its audience on a virtual journey to:

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Add One / Skywatchers

Tour the homes of Mali's Dogon people, who pay careful attention to the sky for growing and storing their grains. Sowing crops at the wrong time in their arid region could be life-threatening, but the Dogon calculate when to plant in anticipation of the rainy season signaled by the appearance of the star Sirius.

Find its way along with the Tuareg across the Sahara Desert in western Africa. These nomadic people travel in caravans transporting goods for trade. The intense heat of the desert means that much travel takes place at night. In the vast Sahara it is easy to lose your way among the shifting sand dunes and featureless stony plains. *Skywatchers of Africa* shows how generations of the Tuareg have navigated across this desert using their knowledge of the night sky to follow trade routes connecting wells and oases.

Experience ancient Egyptian spiritualism, linking the stars with birth, death and the hope for eternal life. Their striking pyramids manifest these beliefs. These monuments were not made for celestial observation, but they are in alignment with the never rising or setting stars, which the Egyptians regarded as the imperishable or undying ones. The orientation of the Great Pyramid to those stars enabled the pharaoh's soul to enter this part of the sky, and live there forever.

As in many cultures throughout the world, the people of Africa continue to use the sky as a guide for bonding their societies and cultures, for laying out their homes and cities and for providing a calendar to steer the future of their communities. Adler's *Skywatchers of Africa* encourages visitors to share in the common bond that ties all people on Earth, experiencing life under one sky.

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 a performance of ethnic drumming, stilt-walking and masquerade at 11:45 a.m. in the Solar System Gallery.

In addition to the debut of *Skywatchers of Africa* on March 20th, the Adler will preview a new exhibit, *Bringing the Heavens to Earth*. Unlike any other in the world, this gallery illustrates many of the cultures that have contributed answers to the timeless quest to understand our place in the Universe, while also exploring the common

Add Two / Skywatchers

astronomical threads that bind humanity across culture, geography and time. *Skywatchers* provides visitors with an opportunity to explore the themes of the exhibit in greater detail.

On Saturday, March 23 and Sunday, March 24, the Adler 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 (more correctly termed Maya) 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, food and drinks with a tropical flair. Free dance instruction will be available. Cover charge is \$12 per person, \$10 for Adler members.

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.

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 71 years. Seven 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

TTY: (312) 322-0995

www.adlerplanetarium.org

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