



Adler
PLANETARIUM

FISCAL YEAR
2025
ANNUAL REPORT





January 2026

Dear friends,

It is my pleasure to present the Adler Planetarium's 2025 Annual Report, which covers our fiscal year July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. As you'll read in the following pages, FY25 was an impactful year—marked by a commitment to community focused programs that connected people to extraordinary experiences. From celebrating the first images from the Vera Rubin Observatory, to our annual engineering competition for hundreds of Chicago middle school students, to hosting world renowned astrophysicists, the Adler brought the wonders of space to diverse communities across Chicago.



The past year was also a time of transition. In August, we joined the world in mourning the loss of NASA Astronaut Captain James Lovell. Captain Lovell was a consistent source of inspiration to the Adler, and his dedication to this institution was nothing short of extraordinary. He inspired many Chicagoans of all ages with his personal story of perseverance, commitment, and hard work—all while serving on our Board of Trustees and helping to create our Mission Moon exhibit. We are grateful to him and his family for their continued support through the establishment of the Lovell Legacy Fund.

We also said farewell to Dr. Michelle Larson as she took up a new role as President of Clarkson University. Michelle skillfully led the Adler for over 12 years through extraordinary times of institutional and societal change. Michelle's commitment to making science and space accessible to all shone brightly as a beacon of hope and inspiration, a commitment we continue today.

As we look toward the future and our approaching 2030 centenary, I am filled with excitement. Public interest in space exploration and discovery has never been greater, and the Adler will bring to life the stunning astronomy discoveries being made each day. Over the next few years, we will reinvest in the Adler as a world-class destination, with new immersive sky shows, digital and interactive exhibitions, and transformative opportunities to connect directly with our astronomers, collections, and online channels.

Thank you for your support and for the many ways you help us connect people to the universe and each other.



Elizabeth Babcock
President & CEO
Adler Planetarium





What makes the Adler Planetarium the institution it is today?

For many, it's the wonder of traveling through space in our planetarium theaters, guided by our extraordinary presenters. To some it's the robust astronomy collection—spanning thousands of years, cultures, and time periods. To others, it's the educational programs that let anyone—regardless of background—become a scientist. To us, it's the community we've spent the last 95 years building.

Our community is full of stargazers, scientists, artists, writers, and educators. They share our drive of connecting people to the universe, their neighborhoods, and each other. Each brings their own unique talents—bridging the gap between science and understanding, sparking creativity and inspiring future generations. Here are the highlights of everything we've accomplished in 2025 together.



REMEMBERING CAPTAIN JAMES LOVELL

At the beginning of August, we lost one of our biggest heroes—NASA Astronaut and lifelong friend of the Adler, Captain James Lovell. He was a consistent source of inspiration to the Adler, and his dedication to this institution was nothing short of extraordinary. In addition to being a member of our Board of Trustees and a co-chair of the Lift-Off! Campaign, Captain Lovell contributed his personal collection of space artifacts to the museum and helped secure the Gemini 12 spacecraft on long-term loan. He inspired many Chicagoans of all ages with his personal story of perseverance, commitment, and hard work.

Captain Lovell is best known for his courageous role as commander of the Apollo 13 mission, which suffered a critical failure en route to the Moon, but was brought back safely to Earth by efforts of the crew and mission control. He also piloted Apollo 8, the first Apollo mission to enter lunar orbit. He is one of only 24 people to have flown to the Moon, and the only one to have flown there twice without making a landing.

In perhaps his proudest role, he was married to his high school sweetheart, Marilyn Lillie Lovell, for 71 years before she preceded him in death. Together, they had four children, eleven grandchildren, and seven great grand-children. Captain Lovell attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, graduated from the United States Naval Academy, the University of Southern California Aviation Safety School, and Harvard Business School's Advanced Management Program. He is a recipient of the Congressional Space Medal of Honor and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Before his passing, Captain Lovell and his family created the **Lovell Legacy Fund**—an endowment that will support the Adler and infrastructure building needs for years to come. To make a donation to the Lovell Legacy Fund or for more information on this endowment, please contact the development office at development@adlerplanetarium.org.



Dear Mr. Lovell
I want to be an astronaut like you.
Fr: Noah
to: Mr. Lovell

Thank you Captain.
You have inspired me to look
up at space and wonder.
solar eclipse
Sun
Moon

Thank you for letting me
want to go explore space
and maybe be the first wo-
man on the moon!!
LOVE
Mila

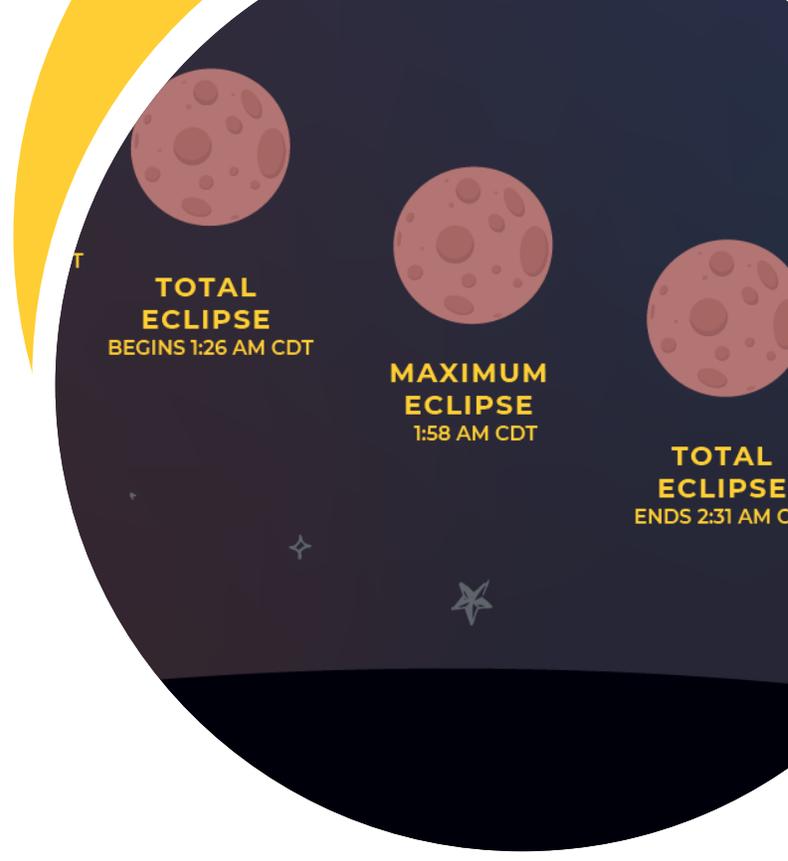




THE UNIVERSE AND YOU

TOTAL LUNAR ECLIPSE

Something spectacular happened in March this year: a total lunar eclipse. These eclipses happen when the Sun, Moon, and Earth align—with the Moon passing through the Earth’s shadow. To celebrate, our Public Observing team put together a special edition of **Sky Observer’s Hangout**, hosted from the campus of Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois. This unique program teaches viewers how to observe the Moon, stars, and other celestial objects all from livestreams on YouTube. Through this program, we showcased the entirety of the lunar eclipse to four thousand viewers around the country—making space science more accessible and engaging.



Sky Observers Hangout: Total Lunar Eclipse March 2025

 **Adler Planetarium**
17.5K subscribers [Subscribe](#)

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THE UNIVERSE AND YOU

CELEBRATING THE RUBIN OBSERVATORY

On top of the Cerro Pachón mountain in central Chile sits the Vera C. Rubin Observatory—a newly constructed observation facility that’s the first of its kind. Home to an 8.4 meter telescope and the largest digital camera ever built, this observatory will take detailed images of the southern hemisphere for the next 10 years—creating the most extensive time-lapse record yet. This data will give us a better understanding of dark matter, dark energy, and our overall universe.

To celebrate the release of first-ever public images, the Adler hosted a watch party. On June 23, 2025, scientists, space enthusiasts, and museum guests alike gathered in our Space Visualization Lab for an exclusive livestream showing the never-before-seen photos. Plus, Adler astronomers were there to answer any space questions, giving guests a one-of-a-kind experience.

Since the initial image release, we’ve used data from the Rubin Observatory on **Adler Zooniverse**—our platform that connects researchers with millions of volunteers who advance astronomical discovery by contributing their time and talents transcribing, analyzing, and categorizing data alongside researchers. Through projects like Rubin Comet Catchers, anyone who has access to the internet can help find comets and other small solar system bodies within these images. To help classify data from the Rubin, click [here](#).



CUTTING-EDGE DOANE OBSERVATORY RESEARCH

In addition to having the largest publicly-accessible telescope in the Chicagoland area, the Adler’s **Doane Observatory** is equipped to perform space science research. During the summer, our Public Observing team and two undergraduate interns used our telescope to observe an exoplanet—a planet that orbits around another star. When an exoplanet passes in front of its star, it changes the amount of starlight we see—creating an event called a transit. Measuring the change helps to confirm the presence of the exoplanet. This data was uploaded to an exoplanet transit database, and is the first time we’ve published exoplanet imaging data for researchers to use in their studies.

Building on this work, we’ve also developed an exercise for community college students to gain hands-on experience analyzing astronomy images. This activity is being piloted with students at College of DuPage to gather valuable feedback before being published and promoted to undergraduate educators on our website. To see data taken from our Doane Observatory or learn more about exoplanet transits, be sure to visit our exhibit **Other Worlds** inside the Adler!

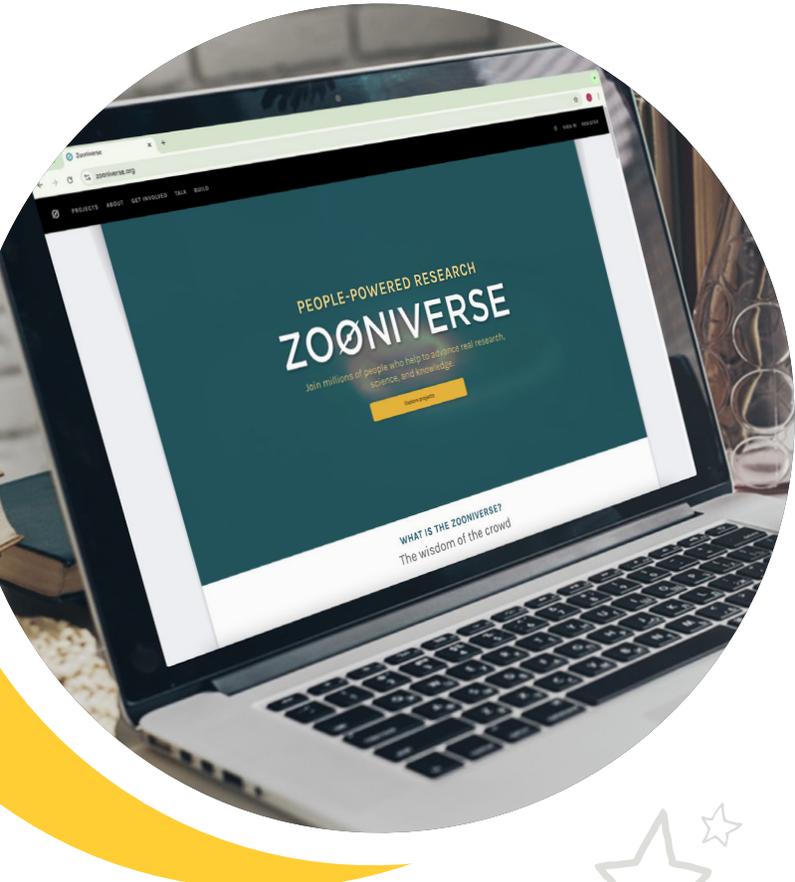




AROUND THE MUSEUM

WORLD-RENOWNED LECTURES

Throughout the past year, the Adler was visited by notable names within the field of astrophysics, including Professor Jocelyn Bell Burnell and Dr. Saul Perlmutter. Each gave an accessible lecture during Adler At Night describing their award-winning research and the life lessons they learned along the way. From the detection of the first-ever pulsar stars to the discovery of our acceleratingly expanding universe, each gave students, stargazers, and museum guests alike a deeper understanding of astronomy and the importance of these discoveries. To stay up to date on our upcoming programs and lectures, please join our events mailing list.



ADLER ZOONIVERSE

Adler Zooniverse—the World’s largest platform for people-powered research—gives anyone the ability to become a researcher. Here, anyone with access to a phone, tablet, or computer can help make groundbreaking scientific discoveries—whether it’s through transcribing historical documents, classifying cloud types on Mars, or studying immune cells in kidney tissue.

In the past year, Zooniverse has become a powerhouse for participatory science—with over 2.9 million registered volunteers, nearly 948 million scientific classifications, and more than 80 active research projects. It’s become a staple within our exhibits and has helped to discover new planets and classify galaxies. To register and participate in Adler Zooniverse, visit [zooniverse.org](https://www.zooniverse.org).





YOUTH PROGRAMS

FAR HORIZONS TEENS

Far Horizons Teens gives high school students a way to conduct internationally recognized research on light pollution—all while building key science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) skills like experiment design, programming, and data analysis.

This year, teens began developing and implementing their very own light pollution research program: examining the relationship between tree phenology—the study of how and when trees change for the seasons—and artificial light at night. They developed a focused research question, created a comprehensive research proposal with a literature review, experimental design, and timeline which was then presented to the Adler’s research community. To ensure success, Far Horizons Teens consulted experts such as tree phenology researcher Dr. Lin Meng, the Morton Arboretum team, and Adler’s Far Horizons staff. They also collaborated with youth groups from the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum and After School Matters.

OPERATION AIRLIFT

For over a decade, the Adler Planetarium has run **Operation Airlift**—an annual engineering competition bringing together hundreds of Chicago middle school students for a day of discovery, collaboration, and STEAM learning. This year, 106 participants worked in small groups alongside volunteer STEAM professionals and Adler program alumni to design, build, and test remote controlled airships attached to high-altitude balloons. They created project plans, managed a budget, and tackled team-oriented obstacles—all of which gave them valuable skills to use in future aspirations. The students who participated in Operation Airlift were nominated by their teachers through an online application, with a focus on ensuring geographical representation across the city.

YOUTH ORGANIZATION FOR LIGHTS OUT (YOLO)

The YOLO program gives teens from Chicago’s Little Village neighborhood the opportunity to lead environmental advocacy efforts surrounding light pollution—an environmental hazard that affects human sleep cycles, animal migration patterns, local plant health, and stargazing. This year, their advocacy efforts included creating community-based strategies for reducing light pollution, developing and implementing interactive, educational activities for local middle schoolers, and presenting their research at two different conferences—Youth Participatory Science Conference and International Dark Sky Week. Experiences from this program give participants problem solving, collaboration, and self-efficacy skills, all while giving them the confidence to become leaders within their own communities.





IN OUR COMMUNITY

'SCOPES IN THE CITY

'Scopes in the City is a cornerstone of Adler programming, bringing our expert staff and equipment to city parks, libraries, and locations throughout Chicagoland and the state of Illinois for free stargazing events. During these events, Adler staff and volunteers set up 1-2 telescopes and invite attendees to take a look and chat about what's in the sky.

During one special program this summer, the 'Scopes in the City crew visited Wrigley Field, where they offered Cubs fans the chance to observe our Sun before the game. These skywatching opportunities are vital to making science accessible to everyone—not just those already in a STEAM field.



ADLER AT NIGHT

Since reopening in 2022, the Adler has been proud to offer **Adler at Night** on Wednesday evenings from 4:00 pm to 10:00 pm—which gives free admission to Illinois residents after the work and school day has ended. These evenings have connected diverse Chicagoans from across the region to the universe by increasing accessibility.

Guests attending Adler at Night have the full planetarium experience at their disposal—from captivating sky shows in our dome theaters to discussions with astronomers at our Space Visualization Lab. Weather depending, Wednesday guests also have an opportunity to stargaze at our Doane Observatory, which is home to the largest publicly-available telescope in Chicago.





ADLER PLANETARIUM FY25 FINANCIALS

REVENUE & SUPPORT

Fundraising Contributions	\$7,804,532
Admissions	\$5,735,461
Chicago Park District	\$1,700,115
Other Government Grants	\$1,334,059
Other Earned Revenue	\$3,519,762
TOTAL	\$20,093,929

EXPENSES

Education & Professional Programs	\$12,254,559
Collections Care & Stewardship	\$659,933
Development	\$1,568,048
Administration	\$3,764,815
TOTAL:	\$18,247,355





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\$100,000+

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The Adler Planetarium honors and remembers David W. Fox, Sr. and Captain James Lovell—two lifetime members of the Board of Trustees.





CONCLUSION

2025 was a monumental year for the Adler Planetarium, and none of it could have been done without support from you and our community. Thank you for being part of our journey!

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