

Scientists focus telescopes on rare Plutonian eclipses

United Press International
FORT DAVIS — University of Texas astronomers are preparing for a rare series of eclipses between Pluto and its moon that could shed light on the far-flung planet's composition.

Scientists at UT's McDonald Observatory on Mount Locke in west Texas are not sure exactly when the eclipses will begin, but they are expected to occur before 1985.

Once they begin, the eclipses will continue every 3.2 days for the next several years. Pluto is only visible from the Earth six months out of the year.

Dr. J. Derral Mulholland, a research scientist, said because Pluto's orbit around the sun takes 248 years, astronomers must look now or wait another

124 years for the next series of eclipses.

Pluto's moon, Charon, was discovered in 1978 by an astronomer at the U.S. Naval Observatory, and scientists all over the world have since used it to learn more about Pluto.

Mulholland said UT astronomers are measuring the brightness of Pluto and making calculations that will help observers recognize the eclipses when they begin.

"If there are enough good eclipse data, and good enough ideas of Pluto's brightness, this will provide a good description of the size and shapes of both bodies and the ice markings," he said.

Another McDonald scientist, Dr. Laurence Trafton, said the eclipses should give researchers

a better idea of the atmosphere and surface of Pluto, which is 2.8 billion miles from Earth and was discovered in 1930.

Scientists at the University of Arizona determined in 1970 that frozen methane gas is a component of Pluto's atmosphere. Trafton said other possible elements of the atmosphere are argon, neon, nitrogen, carbon monoxide and oxygen.

"Organic atmospheres such as Pluto's are very interesting because they are the best candidates for finding life," he said. "At one time, the atmosphere of the earth may have had carbon materials and methane. However, Pluto is not very warm (minus 215 degrees Centigrade), so that's a big strike against it."

Even with the 82-inch tele-

scope at McDonald Observatory, Trafton said astronomers find it difficult to distinguish between Pluto and a star because of its great distance from Earth.

The mysterious Pluto is thought to be about 2,400 miles in diameter, compared to Earth's diameter of about 8,000 miles.

Earlier theories hold that Pluto is dark and rocky, more Earth-like than its gas ball neighbors Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune.

Trafton said although Pluto is usually the farthest-out planet in the solar system, its oval orbit in 1979 brought it inside Neptune's orbit for the first time in more than 200 years, and it will remain there for the next 20 years.



Gotcha covered

Frances Wardlaw, 12, keeps a close watch on Krystal Green during dribbling drills in G. Rollie White. Both are on campus attending the

Texas A&M Girls Basketball which lasts through Wardlaw is from Del Rio. Green is from Cleveland.

Students get diplomas after throwing hats

United Press International
VEGA — Graduating seniors who were denied their diplomas because they threw their hats in the air at the end of commencement will receive their sheepskins after all.

The 22 students, the majority of the graduating class of Vega High School, cannot be denied

the diplomas because it would be a violation of the Texas Open Records Law, according to the Texas Education Agency.

Officials of the TEA and the Vega Independent School District during a school board meeting Tuesday night told parents and students of the ruling.

Smoke detectors would have saved fire victims

United Press International
FORT WORTH — The second deadliest fire in recent city history killed five people who probably would have lived if their motel rooms had been equipped with smoke detectors, fire officials say.

Richard Crain, 40, of Lake La., a regional manager of an oilwell service firm. Crain later was treated for smoke inhalation, said fire officials.

Deputy Fire Chief Don Peacock called Tuesday's blaze the second worst in recent city history, surpassed only by an arson fire at a nightclub that killed eight people.

Tarrant County medical examiner's investigator James Kirkpatrick identified the dead as Elisa Speaks, 28, of San Antonio; John Nick Moreno, 54, of Wichita, Kan.; Wesley Loomis, 46, of Enid, Okla.; Ernest Scott Van Cleave, 26, of Skokie, Ill., and Randy Young, 26, of Liberal, Kan.

Management of the five-story, 303-unit Ramada Inn east of downtown Fort Worth was fined the maximum \$200 for a fire code violation Tuesday for leaving several rolls of discarded carpet in the hallway of a recently remodeled wing.

The fast-moving blaze started in the carpeting after 3 a.m. Tuesday, destroying 87 units, injuring 34 people and sending some 150 guests fleeing into a driving thunderstorm.

Peacock said the fire story. A man rapidly because escaping and movie

No cause for the fire had been determined pending test results expected on Thursday from a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms laboratory in San Francisco. The fire department said all five people who died were found at the foot of their beds or in their bathrooms, indicating they tried to flee before being overcome by smoke.

Nine people were admitted to three Fort Worth hospitals in good condition with smoke inhalation, lacerations, and broken bones. Twenty-five people were treated at four hospitals and released.

Peacock said the fire story. A man rapidly because escaping and movie

"We feel had there been smoke detection equipment there would not have been the

loss of life," said Fire Chief Larry McMillan.

The city's fire ordinance package, passed in 1979, exempted older buildings from having smoke alarms or sprinklers.

Peacock said the fire story. A man rapidly because escaping and movie

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Youths drown in Brazos

United Press International
ANGLETON — Authorities have found the bodies of two Sweeny teenagers who drowned while fishing in the surf of the Gulf of Mexico near the Brazos River mouth.

Brazoria County sheriff's deputies recovered the bodies of Henry Edward Hancock, 17, and Frank Gordon O'Connell, 16, on Tuesday.

Officials said the two fishing in the Gulf near the mouth of the Brazos. They stood about 500 yards offshore when an undertow led them into deeper water.

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