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INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF ASTRONOMY OBSERVANCE CONTINUES DEC. 4 AT GTCC

JAMESTOWN – A series of seven programs in observance of the International Year of Astronomy at Guilford Technical Community College will conclude Dec. 4 with a “celebration of the dawn of modern astronomy,” according to Tom English, astronomy instructor and director of Cline Observatory.

The program will begin at 7 p.m. Friday (Dec. 4) in the auditorium of the Sears Applied Technologies Building on the Jamestown campus. The programs have been made possible by the support of the GTCC Foundation.

John McFarland, a retired high school science teacher from Charleston, SC, will take on the persona of Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) in his presentation about the beginning of modern astronomy. Kepler was imperial mathematician to the Holy Roman Emperor, and was the first person to formulate a mathematical description of how planetary orbits work.

Audiences have found that McFarland taking on the persona of Kepler in full Renaissance clothing makes an engaging presentation of “The Founders of Modern Astronomy.” He has spoken to over 8,000 students and teachers since assuming his Kepler role in 2003.

English said, “400 years ago Galileo was turning his first telescopes toward the heavens. He later sent one of his telescopes to Johannes Kepler. He exchanged letters with Kepler and also sent him one of his early telescopes.”

The presentation will stress the importance of Copernicus’ Heliocentric Theory and McFarland also will discuss the Galileo’s telescopic studies of the moon 400 years ago this winter and his discovery of four moons around Jupiter in 1610. Each discovery is explained within the context of the political and religious turmoil of the period.

McFarland is the founder and president of the Johannes Kepler Project, a non-profit charity started in 2004. The mission of the project is to interest students in science and technology careers and to assist teachers by collecting, creating and cataloging astronomy resources.

The Cline Observatory at GTCC will be open for viewing after McFarland’s presentation, weather permitting.

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