

(Released 8/20/09)

**PROFESSOR EMERITUS TO CONDUCT
VISUAL TOUR OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM**

JAMESTOWN – Aaron Martin, professor emeritus at Guilford Technical Community College, will lecture on “Our Changing View of the Solar System” at 7:30 p.m. Friday (**Aug. 28**) in the Sears Applied Technologies Center auditorium on the Jamestown campus.

The lecture, sponsored by the Cline Observatory and the GTCC Foundation, is open to the public free of charge.

Martin, founding director of the observatory, will conduct a visual tour of the solar system. His talk will provide a glimpse of properties and features of each of the major planets. He also will discuss how an understanding the solar system has changed over time. His presentation is part of GTCC’s celebration of the International Year of Astronomy, a year-long effort in commemoration of Galileo’s first telescopic observations 400 years ago,

Martin was a popular instructor during his decade at GTCC. His enthusiasm for astronomy was infectious, and he always encouraged his students to “keep looking up.”

One of the resources that GTCC’s observatory provides is a scale model solar system that spans the Jamestown campus with appropriately placed displays for the sun, planets and asteroid belts. The solar system walk was envisioned by Martin when he developed the astronomy program at GTCC.

By the time he retired in 2001, he had established the only community college observatory in the Carolinas but the walking tour of the solar system had not become a reality. Over the next few years, Martin worked with the Cline Observatory staff and the GTCC Foundation to help make the project happen. In 1996 GTCC’s Sidewalk Solar System was installed.

The walk starts at the observatory doors with the sun station (the sun is about four inches wide to the scale). The rocky planets, Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars, which orbit close to the sun, also are close to the observatory.

Walking away from the observatory at successively larger intervals, a person encounters the asteroid belt, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and the solar system’s outer icy asteroid belt (which includes Pluto).

Since GTCC had setup its solar system display in such a way that Pluto was presented as being very different from the other eight planets, the observatory made local headlines in 1996 when the International Astronomical Union established a new working definition of “planet” that excluded Pluto.

Each display contains descriptive information, tables of properties, images and dots, arrows and circles that depict the scaled size, motion and

moon orbits of the planet being displayed. Displays can be sponsored by donors to the observatory. Sponsors will be recognized during the lecture.

The observatory will be open for viewing after the lecture, weather permitting. For more about the Sidewalk Solar System, see

<http://www.gtcc.edu/services/observatory/resources/sidewalk.html>

Contact observatory director Tom English at tenglish@gtcc.edu or 336-334-4822 x2620 for more information.

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