

**ENTERTAINING EDUCATION**

# Things are looking up at popular planetarium

By Jan Gaillard  
Correspondent

**LYNNHAVEN**

**A**ttendance is up and feedback is overwhelmingly positive at the Virginia Beach City Public Schools Planetarium, according to director Charles Dibbs.

The planetarium recently awarded its first Planetarium Astronomy Scholarship to Ocean Lakes High senior Neal Fox. The \$500 grant was financed through the sale of glow-in-the-dark T-shirts and donations.

Dibbs, in his seventh year as director, credits advanced technology for the planetarium's skyward trend.

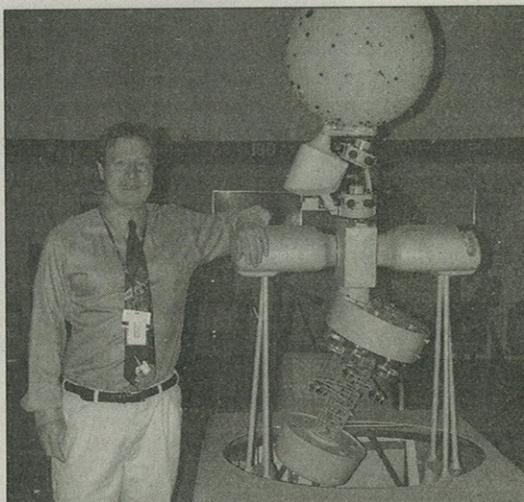
"The computer age caught up with the planetariums," Dibbs said. "Because of the Internet and having computers integrated together better, they made it possible to create better visualization."

The VBCPS Planetarium, built expressly for educational purposes in 1969, is a rarity these days.

"Most planetariums are now being built for a show where people pay to see it," he said. "People come in for education, but they want a unique visual experience, and I try to keep it fresh, informative and creative. I try to give them a total immersive environment."

He credits his role of "solar system ambassador" as part of the reason that the planetarium is enjoying success.

"I applied and volunteered for a job with the Jet Propul-



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**Charles Dibbs, Virginia Beach City Public Schools Planetarium director, pauses beside the planetarium's star projector. The planetarium is celebrating its most successful year to date, said Dibbs.**

## Going?

**What** Virginia Beach Public Schools Planetarium

**Where** 3080 South Lynnhaven Road

**Web site** [www.planetarium.vbschools.com](http://www.planetarium.vbschools.com)

**Phone** 431-4067

sion Laboratory out in California about a year-and-a-half ago," Dibbs said. "I periodically train with the actual space scientists and engineers working on many of the space missions currently in progress, such as Stardust, Cassini, Phoenix and Deep Impact, just to name a few.

"It is through this training that I am provided excellent materials and resources that enable me to do my job better

here in the planetarium."

The planetarium is used primarily by the schools, but groups of 20 or more can schedule visits, and there are free public showings on Tuesday nights except for August.

Janice Deur recently took a group of students from Newtown Elementary School's Galaxy After-School Program to the planetarium.

"The students enjoyed the fantastic and informative planetarium presentation," she said. "They are still talking about it."

Dibbs has hosted several presentations just for Scouts, said Hilda Hagarty with the Girl Scouts Kings Grant Service Unit.

"Many thanks to Chuck for bringing the sky to life for so many of our girls," she said.

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