

SIUE hosts solar eclipse viewing event

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Photo: Cody King • Cking@edwpub.net

Crowds gathered at SIUE's Korte Stadium to view the solar eclipse event that took place this afternoon. Attendees witnessed the eclipse with a totality of 99.5 percent.

For just a few seconds, the city of Edwardsville got darker.

Temperatures dropped, cicadas were buzzing in the trees, streetlights were on and dusk set in for just a few minutes during Monday's solar eclipse event.

Large crowds gathered at SIUE's Ralph Korte Stadium at 11:50 a.m. to take part in a public viewing of the solar eclipse. With a 99.5 percent of totality occurring in the Edwardsville area, the eclipse officially took place at 1:18 p.m.

Physics professor at SIUE Thomas Foster said this occurrence is rare and one the public shouldn't miss.

"We've been waiting for this one for a long time," Foster said. "You've got all of these great, big astronomical scales happening. Then you have to get the moon in the right phase, you have to get the Earth to shadow the moon...you've got to make sure you're in the right place. The fact that we're at 99.5 percent – what makes this special is its rarity. So much has to happen for this to work."

Three 80-inch TVs were on display under the education tent at the stadium showing a view of the eclipse through a large telescope. Both SIUE faculty and physics students were also in the education tent to provide more information about the eclipse process. Free eclipse glasses were also distributed.

Foster said during the eclipse, as dusk sets in, it's not uncommon for animals and nature to be active for a few minutes.

"What's going to happen is, as the moon blocks the sun, it'll get slowly and slowly darker. We would call that dusk, and so will the animals and everything else in nature will have this happen and go, 'Oh, it's dusk. I should do my dusk thing.' As it gets darker and darker, they'll do their normal stuff. So if animals get fed at dusk, like cows or something, they're going towards the feeder because that's what happens at dusk," Foster said.

Following the eclipse, the moon continued to rotate after reaching totality and the sky became lighter again. Attendees were encouraged to not look at the sun even after the eclipse due to ultraviolet light rays being exposed.

The eclipse officially concluded at 2:45 p.m. The next eclipse won't occur until the year 2024.

Foster said even with another eclipse, the level of totality won't be as great as today's eclipse event.

"The next one coming through is in 2024. We will not be as blessed with this much totality – this much of the sun blocked out. So it becomes a rare occurrence for this to happen. And of course, this is not going to happen tomorrow. It didn't happen yesterday. This is a once, essentially every 18 months' phenomenon for the Earth," he said.

With all District 7 schools closed in the area for the eclipse, SIUE decided to host the public viewing to provide a safe space, according to Foster.

"We decided to hold it at SIUE for two reasons: first and foremost, taxpayers pay for the functioning of some of SIUE's dollars. The mission of SIUE includes service – service to our community...So we had all of the equipment. We knew what we had to do to set all this up and make it happen. So we bought the necessary telescopes, filters; we had like 18,000 solar eclipse glasses that are getting passed out at various locations around campus," Foster said. "It got much bigger when the area schools cancelled, because then we suddenly realized we needed to be in a position to be here for all those families who are looking for a safe place to be."

Senior physics student Robert Hildreth said prior to the eclipse event, he was most excited about seeing the 99.5 percent of totality right on his school's campus.

"I want to be able to look at the sun and not see it. I think actually my favorite part of it is the half percent of totality that we're missing," Hildreth said. "When I see that one little slither of light peeking out, that's what I'm really excited about. We're at 99.5 percent and that half percent is going to be even cooler. I think that little slither is going to make it all worthwhile."

With hundreds of students, SIUE staff, and the general public in attendance for the eclipse viewing, Foster said he hopes those who witnessed the eclipse take away an unforgettable experience.

"I hope they take away the majesty of the universe. This is a truly astounding event to be witnessing. So I hope they walk away and just think to themselves, 'I just witnessed something that is just amazing.' It'd be great if they stopped by the education tent and got a little more flavor on it, but if they just walked away going, 'I just saw something amazing,' then we've done our job here. We've given them an experience that they couldn't do someplace else."