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Debunking Mayan doomsday in Plainview

8:58 AM By Brittany Wait



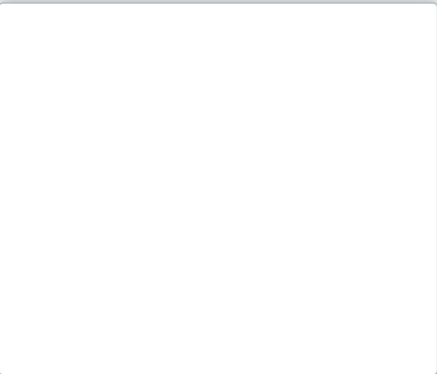
Photo credit: Brittany Wait

At age 9, Kevin Manning took his first glimpse of the night sky through the eye of a telescope.

The moment he saw the rings of Saturn he knew how he wanted to spend the rest of his life.

The retired astrophysicist spent this summer driving across the country debunking theories that the world would end on Dec. 21. On Wednesday night, Manning gave his lecture, "The Great 2012 Scare: Fact vs. Fantasy," to about 70 audience members at Plainview-Old Bethpage Library in Plainview.

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"A lot of people are curious, and we're not at all facing the end of the world on Dec. 21," said Manning, 56, of Bellport. "It's important to let people know that we're going to be OK."

Manning said if the end of each year brings the start of a new year on our calendar, then there's no reason that it couldn't be the same for the Mayan calendar.

"Why shouldn't we think that the Mayan calendar would just end and a new one would begin?" he said. "There's nothing that tells us otherwise. There's no evidence that the Mayans said the world would end in catastrophe on Dec. 21. In fact, Mayan texts refer to dates past 2012."

Norman and Jean Berkowitz go to all the events their library offers, so they sat in on the lecture. "The information he gave me filled in a lot of the blanks," said Norman, 83, of Levittown. "I always thought it was all a hoax. I never anticipated that anything like that would happen anytime soon."

Manning spent half the lecture addressing the science behind the 2009 apocalyptic blockbuster "2012."

"We're always facing impending doom, but the movie '2012' is not based on fact," said Manning, whose resume ranges from teaching at Tufts University in Medford, Mass., consulting with NASA for 15 years and helping students build a telescope in March at Bay Shore Senior High School. "All the books written on the Mayan calendar are wrong."

Darren Lillian, a lab technician at Sunrise Medical Laboratories, has been fascinated with astronomy and science his entire life, so he jumped at the chance to learn more.

"I was never concerned about a 2012 supposed apocalypse," said Lillian, 38, of Plainview. "I guess a little part of me was rooting for it, but I don't want the earth to be destroyed. I just expect something unusual to happen at some point."

Others argue that the world will end when the earth's magnetic field is reversed, causing unprecedented solar storms, he said.

"Will this happen this year? No," he said. "We predict that could happen in 200,000 years, but we're not due for something like that anytime soon."

He said what would really threaten the earth are comets and asteroids. And it is also predicted that the sun will eventually consume itself and surrounding planets, but not for 5 billion years.

A planned group telescope viewing wasn't possible due to weather. But after everyone had left and the clouds finally opened up, Manning pulled out his telescope, which he made 20 years ago, and adjusted it to point at a cluster of stars.

"It's never really left me. I still really love it," he said. "My laboratory is the universe. How many people can say that?"

Tags: Plainview , Mayan , doomsday , theory

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