



In the Community

Under the Stars

Essentially, it is a tent: 5 meters across, dark-blue canvas, dome shaped. What happens inside though, is truly cosmic. That is because this particular tent is an inflatable planetarium designed to bring the majesty of the solar system to children across L.A.

Conceived by Caltech research astronomer Jessie Christiansen along with Jeff Rich, outreach coordinator and astronomer at the Carnegie Observatories, this roving planetarium project came into being as a way to make astronomy more accessible to youngsters, especially those who might not

be able to travel to a conventional planetarium. That's why the duo has focused on taking their star show to pediatric hospitals—two, so far, with hopes of adding more.

Christiansen says her own astronomical “aha” moment happened while gazing at the night skies as a child in rural Australia. “I didn’t need a planetarium; I could just step outside and see the shooting stars and the nebulae.” Being able to bring a similar sense of wonder to children here is rewarding, she says. “You get one kid to go ‘Wow!’ and you’re like, ‘Yes, that’s why we’re here.’”