

SUNY New Paltz to host eclipse viewing

By **Paul Brooks**

Times Herald-Record

Posted Aug 12, 2017 at 6:01 PM

Updated Aug 12, 2017 at 7:25 PM

NEW PALTZ – SUNY New Paltz astronomer Raj Pandya will gamble that a shot at a 75-percent solar eclipse close to home is a better bet than a chancy total solar blackout hundreds of miles away.

Pandya set up an eight-inch telescope outside the John R. Kirk Planetarium at SUNY New Paltz on Aug. 4. He swiveled the black tube on its base and angled it toward the sun hanging above in the clear, blue sky. Then he fussed with alignment and twirled the eyepiece to bring the glowing orb into focus through the sight-saving filter capping the tube.

It was a practice run for Aug. 21. That is when moon swings between the sun and the earth, and the moon's shadow races across the continental United States from west to east. The line marking the total eclipse, where the moon fully blocks out the sun, slants from the state of Oregon through to South Carolina.

The GreatAmericanEclipse.com website estimates that 12.25 million people live in the path of that total blackout. Between 1.85 million and 7.4 million other people are expected to travel for the chance to see the total eclipse.

"If you really want to see it, you have to travel," Pandya said. The best chance is in the middle of the transit, like Kentucky or say, Nashville, Tenn., which is more than 900 miles from New Paltz.

But then there is the risk of clouds obscuring the whole thing. "I would go, but there is just too much uncertainty. So, I said I might as well do it here, and the community can enjoy it."

From 1-4 p.m. on Aug. 21, a Monday, he and members of the Mid-Hudson Astronomical Association club will set up telescopes and provide filters, if needed, to anyone interested in watching the eclipse from the concourse next to the planetarium. Viewers will be able to zoom in on the event with the help of one of the eight or so telescopes he hopes to have on hand, Pandya said.

"It will last for about two-and-a-half hours, start to finish," he said.

The midpoint will come at 2:43 p.m.

"I am hoping 100 people or more show up," he said.

It won't be a total eclipse here, but the moon will cover about 75 percent of the sun at peak coverage, he said.

"We won't see the sky get really dark. With the total eclipse, it will essentially become night," he said.

It is a big deal. The last total solar eclipse in the continental United States was 1979, he said. Records show the track of that event was confined to the Northwest.
