

YSU

Planetarium renovations underway thanks to grant

By Bill Rodgers
News Editor

Richard Pirko, the producer and technician of Youngstown State University's planetarium, and Joe Neiheisel, a physics and astronomy student, stood in the planetarium Wednesday amid piles of lights, tools and stacks of chairs.

Neiheisel was taking chairs apart with a power drill while Pirko considered the pile of lights and electronics around

them.

"We have to get all of the old lights out; we have eight thousand more coming in tomorrow and we need to install them," Pirko said.

Pirko said he and Neiheisel were doing preparatory work in anticipation of the new renovations and equipment due to arrive at the Ward Beecher Planetarium this summer and for the next two years. The renovations are made possible by a \$750,000 grant from the Ward

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Planetarium renovation

Rick Pirko (left) and Joe Neiheisel (right) dismantle a chair in the Ward Beecher Planetarium. The two were getting the planetarium ready for the first of three years worth of renovations totaling \$750,000. *(Jambar photo by Bill Rodgers)*

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Beecher and the Florence Simon Beecher Foundations.

Pirko said that the new equipment would bring YSU's planetarium up to speed with the current technological trends.

"The last renovations to the planetarium were done in 1986," Pirko said. "A lot of technology has changed since then. 1986 was a pre-hard drive era."

Patrick Durrell, the planetarium's director, said that the renovations were important to both the planetarium and the astronomy classes.

"A lot of schools have good planetariums and good classrooms," Durrell said. "The renovations will put our planetarium at the top of both." The renovations for this summer include the installation of new seating, carpeting and lights.

Also due to arrive is a new full-dome video projection

system with a price tag of \$200,600. The full-dome video system will allow video to be shown on the entire dome of the planetarium.

"The full-dome video system is our new toy – I like to call them toys – it's fairly new compared to others in the area," Durrell said. "We're bringing our equipment up to the 21st century."

In 2006, the planetarium will receive a new \$489,000 star projector. The new star projector will replace the current star projector that was installed in 1967.

Pirko said the new projection system would allow the planetarium to simulate the stars from a variety of locations and angles.

"We'll be able to go through one year of sky motion in 10 seconds," Pirko said. "It will be an astounding teaching tool."

Durrell said that the plane-

tarium was due to get a new star projector.

"The current projector has served us well for the past 40 years, this one will do the same for the next 40," Durrell said. The final renovation step will take place in 2007 when the planetarium receives a \$59,000 video projection system made up of three high-definition video projectors.

Pirko said that the new projection system would allow the planetarium to project three high-resolution images on the dome of the planetarium.

Due to the renovations, the planetarium will not be having any more public shows during the summer, but it will re-open to the public in October. The planetarium will still be open to students at the beginning of the fall semester.

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