

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on April 1, 2024.

Solar Eclipse 2024

The last solar eclipse that crossed by southwestern Pennsylvania occurred on August 21, 2017. Westmoreland Library Network Libraries participated in observing the spectacular event by providing to patrons free, certified protective eyewear offered by the National Center for Interactive Learning with funding from Google and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. Murrysville Community Library commemorated the event with a Solar Eclipse Party hosted by Franklin Regional's Science Like a Girl Club, live video streaming of the eclipse, science projects, Storytime STEM-packs™ programming, crafts, and experiments.

The weather cooperated with clear blue skies, and the day at Murrysville Community Library was a huge success, with over 400 people attending. Most of them were outside of the Library on the lawn and in the parking lot watching the eclipse through certified-safe solar glasses. It is not a given that solar safety glasses being marketed are really safe, but these were, and that is no small point to keep in mind as we approach the day of the next observable solar eclipse in our area, April 8, 2024. And there will not be another such opportunity in the contiguous United States until 2044.

This year, a Solar Eclipse Party will be held at Murrysville Community Park, co-hosted with the Murrysville Recreation Department. There will be eclipse information as well as crafts and games. Free eclipse glasses are available on a limited basis.

The 2024 eclipse path over North America begins directly over San Antonio, Texas. It arcs over St. Louis, Indianapolis, and Cleveland. So the Pittsburgh area will have live viewing access, weather permitting, just to the southeast of totality. That is almost as good as it gets for such a wonderful and rare experience.

Free solar glasses are no longer available from the usual on-line STEM-education sources, stock having been already depleted, and the old 2017 ones are not safe to be used anymore. New ones can be purchased, but the Society for Science warns to make sure that they are ISO-certified glasses (International Standards Organization) and were made in the United States.

The American Astronomical Society does offer a list of preferred vendors, and with that lots of other information about viewing a solar eclipse safely (<https://eclipse.aas.org/eye-safety/viewers-filters>).

Free programming is available on-line. The U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) offers an educational livestream of the eclipse on YouTube. It begins at 1:55 PM on eclipse day, and you can access it at home at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAZmtbTTQAE>.

STAR Net (<https://www.starnetlibraries.org>) is a “hands-on learning network for libraries and communities.” It lists among its supporting organizations the American Library

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Association, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the NSF, NASA, and others.

“For eclipse resources for libraries or indirect ways to view the eclipse, you can go to our ‘Getting Started with SEAL’ website.” SEAL stands for “Solar Eclipse Activities for Libraries.” If you are Spanish-speaking, STAR Net offers on-line resources for you as well.

So, put away your social media devices for a while, put your penchant for on-line games on hold, and immerse yourself in what promises to be a spectacular experience that will remain with you long after those other distractions. I remember the wonder of the event of 2017 vividly still, and you will cherish seeing the eclipse of 2024 as well.

Charles B. Greenberg

Board Director, Murrysville Community Library Foundation