

# Observatory project to see first light in holiday season

## To be built on the outskirts of Allenwood Elementary School

By Lianna Bass

WALL TOWNSHIP — The highly anticipated Wall Township Public Schools observatory project is officially underway.

The facility will consist of a 10-by-10-foot building, which, according to Wall Township Public Schools Director of Technology Jeffrey Janover, will comply with all municipal codes. The observatory will be built at the south corner of the Allenwood Elementary School property, beyond the track and backstop.

This location was chosen because it is relatively free from extraneous lights, and has an excellent view of the sky, Mr. Janover said.

It is anticipated that the observatory will see “first light” during the 2014-2015 school year.

The telescope system and observatory dome will be controlled remotely via website, and students and family members will be able to request time on the system through an online form. They will be able to take control of the dome and telescope equipment to point at their desired target, take pictures and videos, then download their images to their local computer, all from their home or at school.

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The observatory will close automatically in the event of inclement weather, and missed observing opportunities will be rescheduled.

The total proposed cost for the facility is approximately \$35,000.

The Wall Township Public Schools Observatory was made possible with help from the Wall Foundation for Educational Excellence. As of Tuesday, the Wall Foundation raised \$20,000 project.

The foundation will continue to raise the remaining money needed for the facility as project moves forward.

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According to Mr. Janover, the Wall Township Public Schools maintenance department will be laying the foundation for the facility. The maintenance department will also be performing all electrical work necessary.

A trench is currently being run from the school to the observatory.

“This will enable us to run electrical power and fiber-optic cabling for network use,” Mr. Janover said.

According to Mr. Janover, the observatory will not require much electrical capacity.

“The only things that get plugged in will be a small network switch and the ability move the telescope and the dome,” he said.

The building will be comprised of an aluminum frame structure which will be covered with a heavy-grade ultraviolet [UV] stabilized polyethylene plastic. The structure itself is being built by PolyDome, a dome manufacturing company based in Litchfield, Minnesota. According to Mr. Janover, PolyDome employees will be installing the building once the foundation is in place.

Mr. Janover hopes the facility will be ready for use by the holiday season. He is thrilled that the project is moving forward successfully.

“This is one of the most exciting things I’ve ever done, and I think this will really enable students to succeed,” he said.

According to Mr. Janover, the facility will be extremely beneficial to the Wall Township community.

Students will explore and investigate a wide range of cosmological objects and events while gaining hands-on experience in the use and maintenance of astronomical equipment. The observatory is meant to help students develop a broader and deeper understanding of their place in the universe and develop and enhance their self-guided learning skills.

Students will also be able to perform meaningful research while collaborating with experts in the field of astronomy and their peers at

other schools. They will be able to present and publish their research through various forums.

The observatory is also meant to be a valuable tool for teachers, who will be able to guide their students in the application of the scientific method for research purposes. It will allow educators to reach out and collaborate with other educational institutions and colleagues from across the world.

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