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Trailing Remnants of Comet ISON

By Cathy Dausman



SMC physics and astronomy professor Ronald Olowin, Ph.D. Photo Cathy Dausman

Learning Center outdoor amphitheater. Children can also make a fun comet craft at this free event.

Because comets are largely icy snowballs with gas and debris filled tails extending for millions of miles, Olowin says "comets come and go," referencing Comet Halley's winter 1986 appearance and Hale-Bopp in 1997. Comets simply bring more artifacts from the outer solar system down to Earth, Olowin explained from his college office, a galaxy-themed tie bedecking his shirt. A dozen more astronomy and science-themed ties were draped close by - the professor selects his tie to match his lecture material. "You and I are star stuff," he said.

If ISON behaves, he said, earthlings can learn more about the quality of water and organic materials contained within. But even without the spectacle of a comet, he noted that looking skyward creates a "harvest of wonder" for us all.

For event details, visit www.lafayettelib.org/calendar/programs/family.html. For more information about Comet ISON, visit www.nasa.gov/ison.

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