

Bringing the light years to life:

Exhibit displays images of the universe through the eyes of a NASA telescope

Caitlin O'Donnell
News Editor

Elon University is one step closer to infinity and beyond with the addition of the "From Earth to the Universe" traveling NASA exhibit currently on display in the Academic Village.

First introduced at College Coffee Nov. 2, the exhibit contains 30 images of the universe taken by the Hubble, Chandra and Spitzer telescopes. Each image also includes a caption explaining the science of the image.

According to the exhibit's website, the images display some of the most dramatic views of the universe.

"The images represent the incredible variety of astronomical objects that are known to exist — planets, comets, stars, nebulae, galaxies and the clusters in which they congregate," the website reads.

Dan Evans, assistant professor of physics, said bringing the exhibit to Elon took a lot of time and effort but was well worth it.

One of his colleagues came up with the original idea and Evans said he has been working with the exhibit for about two and a half years.

"I spent the past decade working for one of NASA's Great Observatories and we call this the Chandra X-ray observatory," he said.

According to NASA's website, the X-ray is used to detect sources of X-rays billions of light years away.

"Chandra's improved sensitivity is making possible more detailed studies of black holes, supernovas and dark matter," the website reads. "Chandra will increase our understanding of the origin, evolution and destiny of our universe."

According to Evans, the X-ray takes some of the most beautiful images of the universe available.

"A colleague came up with an outreach project showcasing the universe," he said.

Since its inception in 2008, the exhibit has been on display in Washington, D.C., Moscow, Iran and

more than 50 other countries.

Evans said the exhibit is particularly meaningful to a campus such as Elon's, which puts emphasis on the significance of engaged learning — visitors to the exhibit see real images, rather than reading descriptions in a text book.

"One of the things I've wanted to do is not to have this as a static exhibit, but have as many people with it as possible," Evans said.

This includes his Introduction to Astronomy class and elementary school students who toured the exhibit Monday morning. Evans said he has also received positive comments from Elon faculty.

But Evan's connection with the Chandra Observatory isn't over quite yet.

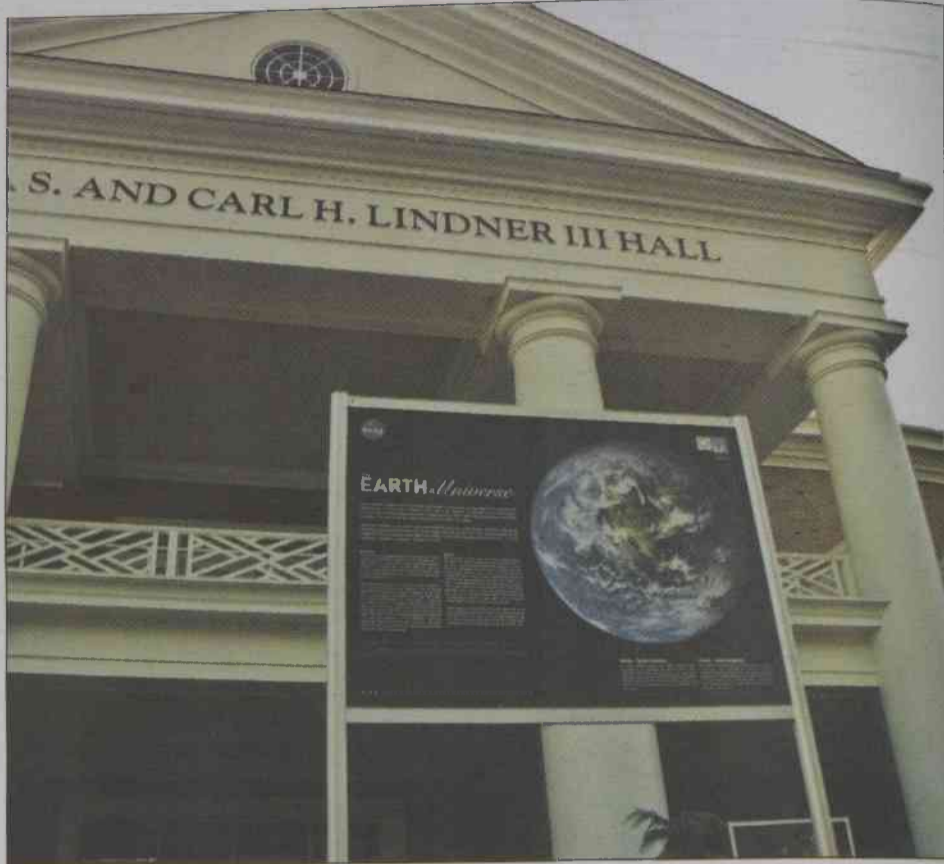
As a black hole astrophysicist, he is also conducting research looking at the role black holes play in the universe.

"It turns out to be a very important one," he said. "(Black holes) are incredibly crucial to the formation and evolution of the universe as we know it. I'm also using black holes to test Einstein's theory of relativity."

The "From Earth to the Universe" exhibit, dubbed by Evans as "From Elon to the Universe," will be on display until next week.

Categories of objects on display

- Solar system: includes planets, asteroids and comets
- Nebulas: vast clouds of gas and dust between stars
- Galaxies: system of stars, gas, dust and dark matter bound together by gravity
- Stars: glowing balls of gas held together by their own gravity
- Supernovas: glowing debris left over from stars that have exploded
- Galaxy clusters: contain thousands of galaxies and hot gas



Boards display pictures of the solar system, galaxy and universe outside of Lindner Hall and around the Academic Pavilion. Topics include the very distant — black holes — and the very near by — Earth. BRIAN ALLENBY | Staff Photographer



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