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Planetarium Group Finds a Star in U-46

*Teacher Peggy Hernandez named a Fellow of the Great Lakes
Planetarium Association*



ELGIN - As the School District U-46 planetarium teacher, Peggy Hernandez has helped introduce thousands of students to the science and wonder of the universe, and her work with a professional organization has earned her some well-deserved recognition here on Planet Earth.

Hernandez was recently named a Fellow of the Great Lakes Planetarium Association, a professional organization dedicated to supporting astronomy and space science education through planetaria.

Hernandez joined GLPA in 2009, the first year she was named to teach at the U-46 Planetarium, which was built in Elgin in the 1960s as an addition to the historic 1909 Elgin Watch Factory observatory building.

“Peggy’s knowledge of Earth and space science is dwarfed only by her incredible ability to engage each and every visitor,” said Deb Perryman, the

U-46 Coordinator of K-12 Science and the Planetarium. "She is one of the most talented educators I have ever had the pleasure of working with. Clearly she has impacted those beyond U-46 as evidenced by this honor from the Great Lakes Planetarium Association."

GLPA members work in public and private schools, universities and museums, and the group supports space science education through conferences and publications. The Fellow award recognizes a member's professional status and significant contributions.

Hernandez was honored in October at a GLPA meeting in East Lansing, Mich. She currently serves as the education chair of the GLPA executive committee, and she has often been a presenter at the group's events.

Each school year, Hernandez interacts with about 16,000 U-46 students who make class field trips to the planetarium to learn the science behind the stars and planets. She also makes presentations to Scouting groups and members of the public who can tour the facility on select dates throughout the year.

Hernandez had been a longtime U-46 science teacher at Canton Middle School in Streamwood and Eastview Middle School in Bartlett when she accepted the planetarium teaching job. She discovered her own interest in the cosmos through an astronomy course in college. As a middle school teacher, Hernandez organized popular star-gazing programs for her students. When the planetarium position opened, it seemed like a natural fit.

"For me, it's been the perfect storm. I love it!" she said.

But Hernandez said she felt like "a deer in the headlights," after first taking over at the planetarium. The GLPA provided her with resources and practical teaching tips that helped her grow as an educator, she said.

In addition to her professional development with the GLPA, Hernandez has completed the training and additional study required to become a National Board Certified Teacher. The voluntary program certifies teachers who have,



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though rigorous and comprehensive additional training, reached a high level of competence.

On any given school day, Hernandez operates the planetarium projector while teaching three to four sessions for up to eight classrooms of students of varying age levels. U-46 teachers sign up at the start of school year to bring their students to one of Hernandez's programs, and the list fills quickly. This year, 692 teachers registered.

The planetarium is first and foremost a classroom, but there are regular chances for the public to tour it and the observatory at 312 Watch St. The next public event is set for Monday, Dec. 3, with a presentation on the Geminid meteor shower. More information is available at [this link](#).

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School District U-46 serves nearly 39,000 families from 11 communities within Cook, DuPage and Kane counties. The 57 District schools and programs are located across 90 square miles. To learn more, visit the U-46 [website](#), or like us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).