

92 Stargazing at GaTech

Stellar views from downtown Atlanta

There's only one telescope in downtown Atlanta strong enough to see the moon, planets, and stars, as well as power the Astronomy Department at the Georgia Institute of Technology, locally known as "Georgia Tech" or "GaTech." Southerners love college football – approaching the intensity of Europeans' love for soccer. So there are many who know and regularly attend Georgia Tech Yellow Jacket football games. In fact, one of its mascots was the subject of a *Jeopardy* question in 2018 (the answer: Ramblin' Wreck, a restored 1930 sport coupe that's been used at the school since 1961). But there's a hidden gem on campus.

It was a long and storied path for Dr. James "Jim" Sowell to get the 20-inch, Italian *Officina Stellare* telescope installed on the roof of the Howey Physics Building. But he succeeded, and today during Public Nights, young stargazers not only have access to Georgia Tech's Observatory, they're also learning about the solar system, stars, galaxies, and the universe, as well as astro-particle, electromagnetic, gravitational, and stellar astrophysics.

You'll be among some very smart people when you visit the observatory, as many of the department's students attend Public Night, too. But don't be intimidated because everyone here is friendly and welcoming. On any given visit, you might see the moon, or maybe Saturn and its rings.

Public Night is held once per month, usually on the Thursday closest to when the moon is at first quarter – a half moon. The orientation of the Sun, Earth, and Moon is such at these times that the shadows are evident, so it's easy to see the rugged surface of the moon and its craters and mountains. Public Nights are usually two to three hours but are dependent on rather clear skies. So watch for email and social media for announcements. These events are always free, but there's a fee to park at the Physics building.

Address 837 State Street, Atlanta, GA 30332, +1 (404) 385-1294, www.astronomy.gatech.edu |

Getting there Red or Gold Line to Midtown | **Hours** See website for events. Dependent on the weather. | **Tip** After looking up, look down – into the water. Catch a swimming or diving competition at Georgia Tech's McAuley Aquatic Center, which was part of the 1996 Olympic Games (750 Ferst Drive, www.ramblinwreck.com/sports/c-swim).

