



The wild side of the universe

1. The big mystery: All the stars, planets, comets, gas clouds and everything else out there visible to human eyes or instruments make up less than 5 percent of the universe. "What's the rest? We're not sure," Slahor said. Dark matter — something that's invisible but has mass — makes up about 25 percent of the universe. Dark energy makes up the other 70 percent. What is dark energy? It's an invisible energy that may permeate space. In other words, most of the universe is a true mystery.

2. Danger: You've heard the expression, the light at the end of the tunnel. "A black hole is something like the tunnel at the end of light," Slahor said. Black holes are places where the gravity is so intense, nothing can escape — not even light. Scientists think a black hole begins to form when a cooling star's atmosphere escapes, exposing its core. The star collapses, explodes and becomes a place where a lot of mass is squeezed into a small space. And we're talking a lot of mass. One black hole Slahor mentioned is smaller than Texas, "but if we could cut out one square inch of it and bring it back to earth, it would weigh 1.5 million tons."

A walk on the wild side of the universe was what Dr. Stephanie Slahor offered at her Thursday lecture at the Hi-Desert Nature Museum. Slahor punned and stunned her audience with her quick trip through the stars. Here are seven of her fun facts.

3. Ancient riddles: The three largest pyramids at Giza correspond in general angle and distance to the three stars in Orion's belt, Slahor said. Nearby, the Nile wends its way by in a direction that corresponds to the Milky Way.

4. Runaway: Things in space move fast, and we humans are along for about 514,000 miles per hour through the Milky Way galaxy. The solar system makes a full circuit around the Milky Way roughly every 225 to 250 million years. Scientists call that one galactic year. As Earth orbits the sun, our planet is traveling about 18½ miles per second, or 67,000 miles per hour.

5. Running hot and cold: Space may be cold, but it's hotter than Hades on the sun's surface, where the temperature is 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit. As hot as that is, lightning strikes on Earth run even hotter — about 30,000 degrees.

6. Other planets are weird: Venus might be named after the goddess of love, but it's hardly lovely there. The average temperature is 900 degrees. Winds get up to 220 miles per hour on Venus, blowing around an atmosphere carbon dioxide and nitrogen. And as on Mars, the sky on Venus would look orange to a human, with blue colors at sunrise and sunset. Because Venus turns on its axis the opposite way that Earth does, the sun on that planet rises in the west and sets in the east. The same is true of Uranus. Another funny thing about Uranus: It orbits upright. "Maybe a meteor hit it and knocked it for a loop, or more precisely, a quarter of a loop," Slahor said. "It's not spinning through space, it's rolling through space." Like Saturn, Uranus has rings, but those rings run north and south.

7. Oort you glad to see me? Pluto isn't the last object in our solar system. Past the dwarf planet are the Oort Cloud and the Kuiper Belt, collections of icy worlds. "Out in the Kuiper Belt we find planets galore," Slahor said. Among



Dr. Stephanie Slahor talks about the relative size of planets at her Thursday lecture at the Hi-Desert Nature

Museum plans more activities

YUCCA VALLEY — Steve Hanson will share the 1958 history of the "Hospital House" at 5:30 p.m. today at the Hi-Desert Nature Museum.

The "Hospital House" was raffled off to raise money to build a hospital in Yucca Valley.

The Morongo Basin Historical Society presents programs about the early days of the Morongo Basin on the second Wednesday of each month at the museum. A \$5 donation is suggested.

The Hi-Desert Nature Museum will host a Family Fun Day with free animal-themed activities for all ages 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Feb. 9.

Activities include hands-on crafts, face painting and a scavenger hunt. Kids can get close to bugs and touch Madagascar hissing cockroaches.

The Wild Wonders Animal Show will bring animals from all over the world, including a live alligator, at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. in the community center's Yucca Room.

For information on programs, call the museum at (760) 369-7212.

Suicide grief support group forms

JOSHUA TREE — A six-week support group, "Healing Your Suicide Grief," will meet 1 to 2:30 p.m. Saturdays Jan. 12 through Feb. 16 at Hospice of Morongo Basin at 61675 Twentynine Palms Highway.

Nancy Goudie, a registered nurse, will facilitate this free group, sponsored by hospice's