



## **Planetarium Tour, Pensacola State College**

### **A Clear View of the Night Sky**

Twenty-six Panhandle Senior Travelers enjoyed a clear view of the night sky on our November 8 visit to Pensacola State's Planetarium. The 90-minute program covered star gazing and astronomy in the 40-foot, state-of-the-art planetarium. PSC's facility is considered medium sized but is the only planetarium accessible for group tours between Tallahassee, New Orleans, and Huntsville.

Upon entering, an inviting foyer holds display cases of rocket models and space items, plus various other scientific exhibits. Entering the dim planetarium theatre, purple lighting illuminated the dome. We sat in comfortable leather chairs, permanently reclined to offer a direct view of the concave sides and circular dome providing a perfect view of the night sky from any seat. The first part of the program, the 2018 film *From Earth to Universe*, was projected in IMAX style in the dome. The 30-minute film covered the history of star-gazing, astronomy, notable historical figures, the development of telescopes, and current space exploration.

The planetarium director, Billy Jackson, pointed out that even though the film is new, science changes constantly, especially with the James Webb space telescope relaying new images with new discoveries.

For the second part of the program, the planetarium dome was filled with an image of the Pensacola-area night sky and what it will look like the evening of the presentation. Jackson, who narrated this portion of the program, pointed out key features such as the time-changing clock and compass; he then removed the moon and planets from the sky view, leaving only the stars overhead in the darkened dome. We learned to recognize major stars, asterisms, and constellations. A series of illustrations overlaid on the stars depicted the constellations, as he pointed out notable stars and how the constellations got their names. I felt as if the mesmerizing program had been designed especially for us. I was impressed with his wealth of knowledge and enjoyed the personal, down-to-earth approach of his presentation.

Even though year after year in science classes, I stuck those gold, silver, and red stars on the outlined shapes of constellations, this is the first time I have truly understood the scope, size, and dimension of the astronomical map. Without a planetarium visit, I don't think I could have comprehended the magnificence of our night skies.