



PRESS RELEASE: Lift-off for region's Solar System Drive 27.11.07

An astronomy adventure that's been more than a decade in the making is set to lift-off just in time for Christmas.

The World's Largest Virtual Solar System Drive – Warrumbungle Shire's new tourist experience - will be officially launched on December 19th at Siding Spring Observatory.

The launch will also include the release of an activity book targeted at primary school students to complete either in the car as they experience the drive or in the classroom with their teacher.

The idea of creating a scaled solar system focussed on a town hailed the Astronomy Capital of Australia was hatched more than a decade ago. But it wasn't until 2005 - when Warrumbungle Shire Council secured a \$418,365 AusIndustry grant - that design and construction of the project burst into action.

Warrumbungle Shire Council's General Manager Bob Geraghty said there had been a lot of time and hard work injected into the project particularly over the past two years.

"The Solar System Drive Project Management Committee has worked tirelessly during the past two years to ensure this new tourist attraction is a success for our region," Mr Geraghty said.

Mr Geraghty added that although the signage and installation component of the project is fully complete, together with extensive marketing and promotional material, Council's support for the project would be ongoing.

"Council will continue to support the Solar System Drive through the Tourism Unit's active marketing and promotion as well as general maintenance of the billboards and planets to ensure we are providing a high quality attraction to our visitors," he said.

Visitors are taken on a cosmic adventure when they travel Pluto to the Sun along one or more of five drives that lead to Coonabarabran from Gulgong, Dubbo, Tamworth, Merriwa and Moree. The planets and distance between each is 38 million times smaller than it would be in outer space.

All drives finish at Siding Spring Observatory 28 kilometres west of Coonabarabran. The Sun in this scaled model is represented by the huge Anglo-Australian Telescope dome at the Observatory. Visitors can learn interesting facts about our Solar System both along the drive and at the hands-on Siding Spring Exploratory.

The construction, artwork and installation of the 24 billboards was a local effort thanks to Newton's Mechanical Repairs, Coolah Fibreglass and Steve Walker Signwriting.

The 3-dimensional planets were installed by mid year and since then a focus has been on the promotion and marketing of the drive.

Brochures and maps of the drive are available or visitors interested in the attraction can go to the website www.solarsystemdrive.com.

For more information on the World's Largest Virtual Solar System Drive or to obtain a brochure, map or activity book contact Coonabarabran Visitor Information Centre on freecall 1800 242 881.

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