

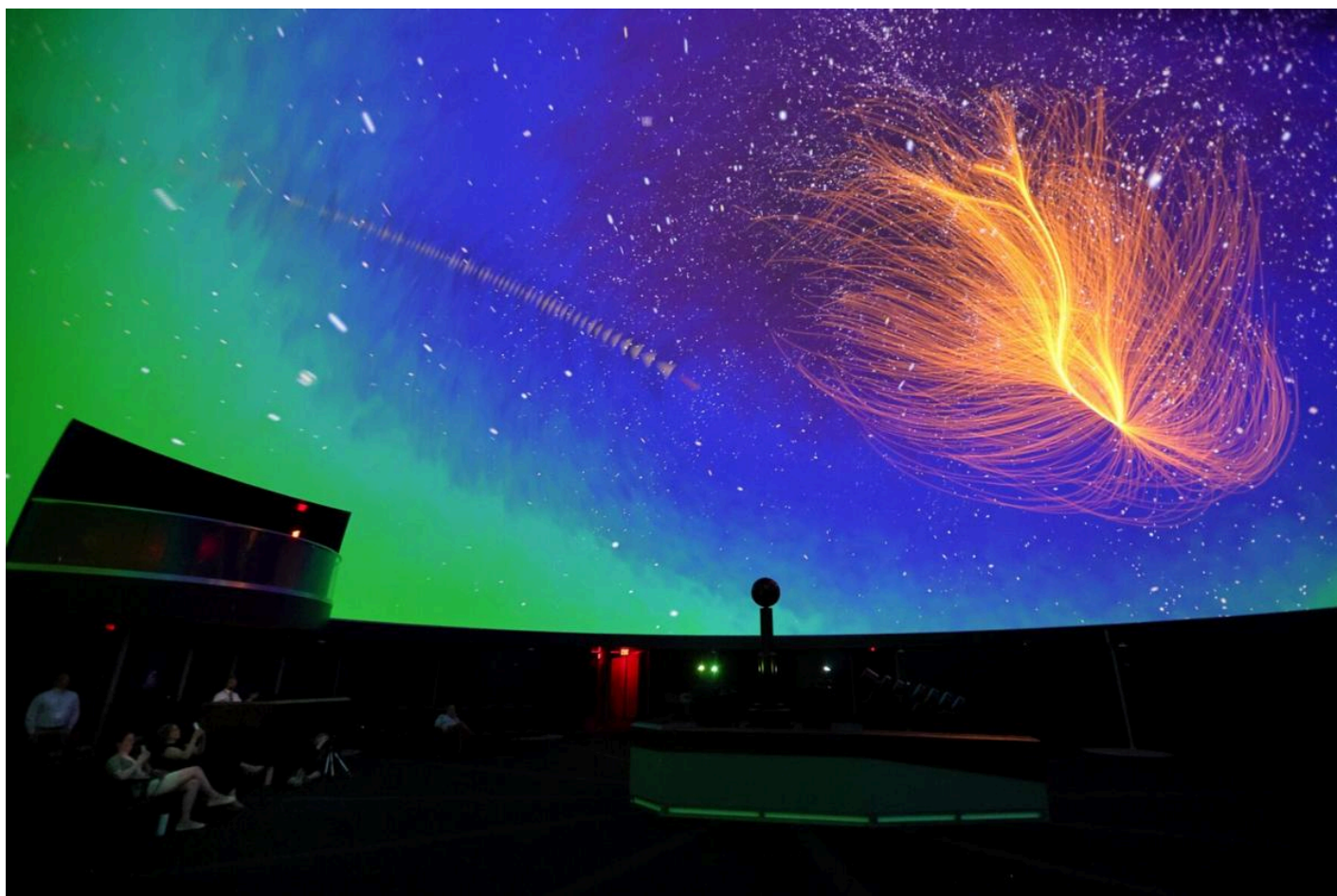
TOP STORY SPOTLIGHT

St. Louis Science Center

St. Louis Science Center planetarium re-opens next week with upgrades, new show

Sam Oaks-Leaf | Post-Dispatch

Jul 9, 2026



The newly installed Cosm Digistar Full-Dome Data Visualization System and a GOTO Chiron III Hybrid Star Projector display a visualization of the Laniakea supercluster, which contains nearly 100,000 galaxies including the Milky Way, during a demonstration at the James S. McDonnell Planetarium on Thursday, July 2, 2026.

David Carson, Post-Dispatch



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Since 1963, the James S. McDonnell planetarium has shown millions of St. Louisans the night stars.

Now the Earth is taking center stage.

The planetarium at the St. Louis Science Center has been closed to the public since February for major technological upgrades. It reopens July 18 with a new show, "The Earth Today."

"Rather than looking at the sky like we have for years, we now will fly up above the Earth and look back," said Will Snyder, the planetarium's manager.



James S. McDonnell Planetarium manager Will Snyder operates the control board for the newly installed Cosm Digistar Full-Dome Data Visualization System and a GOTO Chiron III Hybrid Star Projector, as an image of a black hole is displayed during a demonstration on Thursday, July 2, 2026.

David Carson, Post-Dispatch

The new show takes the perspective of a satellite. Updating every minute, the new digital system will access and display real data as it is collected from satellites around the globe. The planetarium's educators will walk the audience through how the ever-changing wind and ocean currents affect each other, the weather and even current events.

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The new performance, titled “The Earth Today: A Changing Planet,” premieres alongside revivals of two of the planetarium’s staple programs: “The (New) Sky Tonight” and the young children’s show “The Little Star That Could 360.”

Part of what enables the real-time data visualization in “The Earth Today” is newly installed digital technology that works with a new analog star projector — a GOTO Chiron III — which can show audiences 100 million stars with a resolution equivalent to 70,000 pixels on a digital screen.

The projector is the first of its kind to be installed in the U.S., according to the science center. It replaces the planetarium's analog star projector, installed in 2001.

Ryan Wyatt, a planetarium expert at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, said he has long admired the live presentations of the night sky at the McDonnell planetarium, which used only an analog projector. Now, he said, “It’s exciting to think about that expanding into data visualization content.”

Other prominent planetariums in the nation, such as the one at the American Museum of Natural History, include both mechanical and digital components — but they're not able to operate together seamlessly in the same presentation, said Wyatt.

The analog system provides a much higher resolution than any digital system could alone, but “it’s a one-trick pony,” and shows you only the starry sky as it would be seen above our heads, said Snyder, the planetarium manager.

The combination of analog and digital allows for more flexible and wide-ranging programs. The planetarium, for example, can show the night sky over St. Louis in one moment, then pivot to video simulations of ocean current data in another.

For some St. Louisans, the renovations signify a major upgrade for a beloved institution.

Steve Golembieski grew up in St. Louis and now lives in Midland, Texas. On a recent visit, Golembieski brought his son and his parents to the science center three days in a row.

“Each time we come here, we haven’t been able to leave the planetarium building to get to the rest of the science center, because it’s too fun,” said Golembieski.

The planetarium shows were still closed for renovation while Golembieski was visiting, but the building surrounding the planetarium hosts many other space-focused activities, like flight simulators.

The planetarium has attracted nearly 25 million visits since it opened in 1963 in Forest Park. In 1985 the planetarium joined with the Museum of Science and Natural History to become the St. Louis Science Center, straddling Interstate 64.

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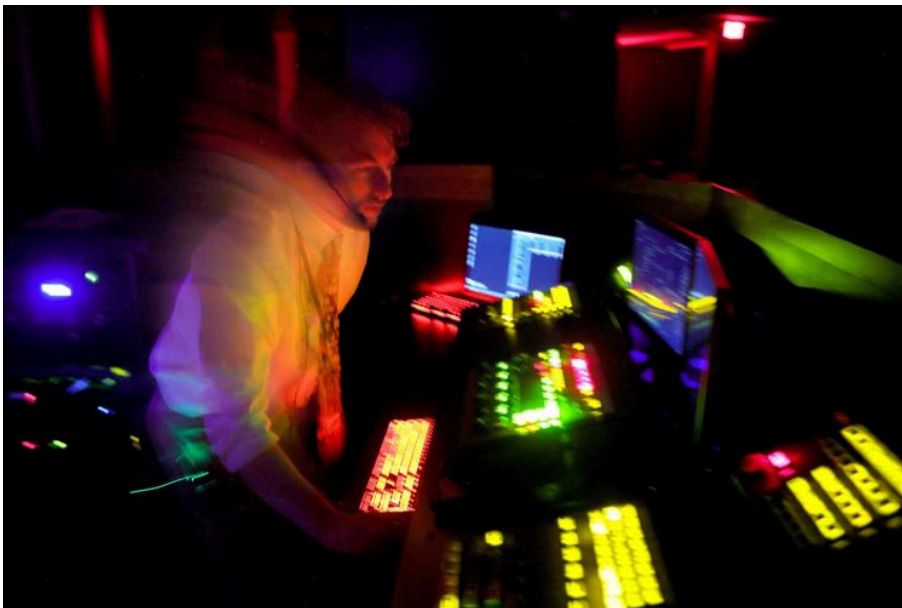
It had more than 637,000 visitors last year and is part of the Metropolitan Zoological Park & Museum District.

In addition to the new display technologies, the planetarium has added an audio system called Auracast that interfaces with cochlear implants to help visitors who require hearing assistance. Snyder said it is the first such system installed at a public facility in St. Louis.

During the past six months, the planetarium has also installed a new sound system and renovated its entryway to allow for easier access. Additionally, new electrical transformers had to be installed because the GOTO star projector runs on Japanese voltages, said Snyder.

The \$2 million in renovations and upgrades were funded through a donation from the Centene Foundation, the charitable arm of the St. Louis based healthcare company of the same name.

The next item on Snyder's wish list for future renovations is a permanent installation for laser shows.



James S. McDonnell Planetarium manager Will Snyder, left, operates the control board for the newly installed Cosm Digistar Full-Dome Data Visualization System and a GOTO Chiron III Hybrid Star Projector during a demonstration in St. Louis on Thursday, July 2, 2026.

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The newly installed Cosm Digistar Full-Dome Data Visualization System and a GOTO Chiron III Hybrid Star Projector at the James S. McDonnell Planetarium as seen after a demonstration in St. Louis on Thursday, July 2, 2026.

David Carson, Post-Dispatch



The "314 Day" signage -- which celebrates all things St. Louis on March 14, adorns the side of the McDonnell Planetarium.

Michael Thomas



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View life in St. Louis through the Post-Dispatch photographers' lenses. Edited by Jenna Jones.
Post-Dispatch photographers



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