# You Can Learn a Lot From a Dot

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**Chuck**

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TRANSIT TO VENUS
midwest treasure: TROVE

PRESS RELEASE: 16 May 2012

Who: Dr. Steven H. Williams of NASA Science Mission Directorate, on assignment from Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum
What: *You Can Learn a Lot From a Dot*, a talk on the upcoming transit of Venus and other discoveries from celestial alignments
When: Thursday, May 17, at 7:00 p.m. EDT
Where: Penn-Harris-Madison (PHM) Digital Video Theater (**map**), Mishawaka, IN

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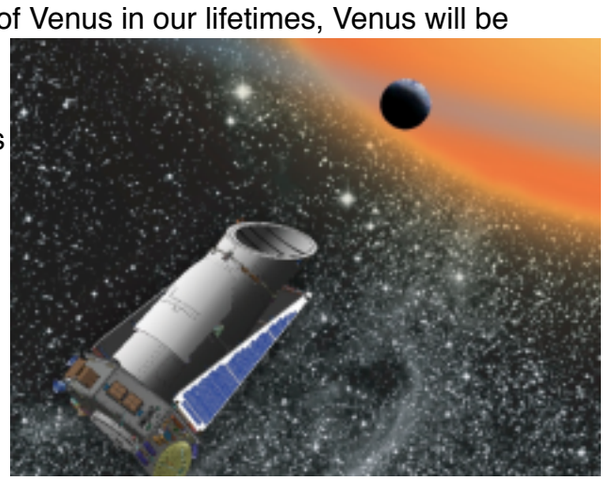
## NASA Astronomer Celebrates Celestial Alignments

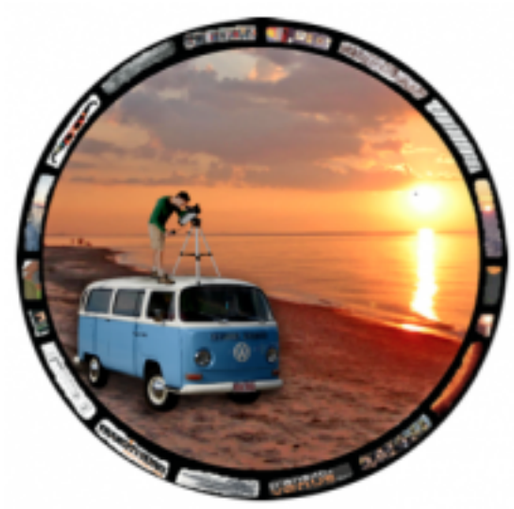
Dr. Steven Williams, a NASA education and public outreach leader, will feature the transit of Venus as he shares his insight on celestial alignments in his presentation *You Can Learn a Lot From a Dot*, on Thursday, May 17, at 7:00 p.m. at the PHM Digital Video Theater (**map**). During this last transit of Venus in our lifetimes, Venus will be visible only through **protective eyewear** as the planet crosses the face of the sun the evening of **Tuesday, June 5,** 2012.



On assignment to NASA from the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, Williams will describe how the transit of Venus is like a front row seat to celestial alignments that astronomers seek far away. The transit method is a technique by which astronomers using the **NASA Kepler** spacecraft are finding new planets around distant stars.

The presentation opens a three-day stint for Williams as 2012 Transit of Venus (**TROVE**) celebrations get underway in the region near the Michigan-Indiana border, dubbed Michiana. Admission is $3.00 for adults; $2.00 for seniors.

In recent centuries when **transits have occurred**, nations sent astronomers across the globe in a quest to measure the size of the solar system by timing the duration of the celestial event. Those international experiments will be re-created in 2012 with a simple **Transit of Venus phone app** that gathers the recorded times and GPS locations of modern observers.



Among the **events in Michiana**, people can watch the solar spectacle safely from several organized **sites** with solar-filtered telescopes. Last week, **three transit-related art exhibits** and a display of historic **artifacts and information** opened in Mishawaka, Granger, and Benton Harbor. The **TROVE Adventure** is a treasure hunt involving dozens of local businesses and institutions that provides free solar-viewing shades to families who successfully visit and get a Keyword clue from ten of the Michiana sites. The solar shades are each equivalent to 70 pairs of sunglasses, per **Jay Pasachoff**, an expert on transit of Venus astronomy.

On Friday, May 18, Williams will travel to Notre Dame and local schools to speak with students about NASA and space exploration. Friday evening he will be at the **Michiana Star Party** getting underway in conjunction with the Cass County's **Celebrate the Earth & Stars in the Park** in Vandalia, MI. At the **Dr. Lawless Park's Earth Day Celebration** on Saturday, Williams completes his tour with the opening talk at 1:00 p.m. EDT.

A partial solar eclipse seen at the **Sunday sunset over Lake Michigan** is an exclamation point on the weekend. Just as the sun settles toward the horizon, the unseen circular new moon sneaks above the horizon and begins to impinge on the lower portion of the solar disk. It's the beginning of an annular eclipse that is visible in its entirety in some southwestern states. The **Kalamazoo Astronomical Society** will set up solar filtered **telescopes at Warren Dunes State Park** in this precursor to the June 5 transit of Venus.

The next transit of Venus visible in the Midwest will occur in December 2125. The most recent Sun-Venus-Earth alignment was in 2004, a global sensation which Google deemed the world's #1 Popular Event that month (**Zeitgeist, June 2004**).

Michiana astronomy enthusiasts have established **TROVE** as a Midwest hub of 2012 Transit of Venus programs and are bracing for increased interest during the **June 5 celestial apparition**. A **tour by exclusive motor coach** eases the task for enthusiasts to visit many transit of Venus highlights on June 5.

More TROVE events and viewing sites are listed at **www.transitofvenus.org/trove**.

## Bio: Steven H. Williams

Dr. Steven H. Williams is presently on a temporary detail assignment to NASA headquarters, serving as Education/Public Outreach Lead for NASA's Planetary Science Division, part of the Science Mission Directorate. His "home" is the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum's Education Division, where he has served as Chair and as Chief of Education Initiatives. He has an academic background in planetary science, as well as education and education management. He was a 2010 Fellow for the Center for the Advancement of Informal Science Education (an ASTC/NSF entity), where he specialized in education policy, and he recently served with the Smithsonian's Office of Policy and Analysis, helping research and write a major study of the pan-Smithsonian education enterprise.

## Media Contacts

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## Online Resources

- **www.transitofvenus.org** by Chuck Bueter
- **www.transitofvenus.nl/wp** by Steven van Roode
- **http://venustransit.nasa.gov** by NASA Sun-Earth Day
- **www.transitofvenus.org/trove**
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