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## **A starry, starry night in Westampton**

By Melissa Hanejko, correspondent

Star light, star bright ... how many stars will you see Friday night?

Join the experienced astronomers at the Rancocas Nature Center for an evening of star gazing, and the answer will be "a lot!"

From mesmerizing meteor showers, to captivating constellations, the night sky is full of mystery and intrigue. The fascination dates back to ancient times, when Mesopotamians and Babylonians recorded sightings of stars and constellations on clay tablets and stones.

Astronomy played an important role in history, used as a forecasting tool, a basis for literature, and even entertainment.

In modern times, stargazing is more often done indoors, by staring at a movie screen or a television. While those stars are certainly flashy, their lights are dimmed by the light of the stars in the sky.

Late August in particular was packed with exciting celestial events, including the Perseid meteor shower and a red moon. What more does the month have to offer stargazers? Find out Friday, from 8 to 11 p.m., as members of the West Jersey Astronomical Society host an evening of star watching on the grounds of the Rancocas Nature Center.

Appropriate for both beginners and advanced astronomers, guests will learn to use a telescope to view planets, star clusters

and galaxies. Those in attendance will also discover exciting facts about constellations, astronomy basics, and observation techniques.

The Rancocas Nature Center, at 984 Rancocas Road in Westampton, is part of the 210 acres of open space in Rancocas State Park, making it an optimal setting for stargazing. The center is a hub for environmental education in the region, and offers educational programs for schools, senior centers, educators and the public. In addition, the Nature Center features a number of outdoor amenities, such as hiking trails, wetlands, display gardens, a dragonfly pond, and meadows that can be toured by visitors.

The fees for the event are \$10 for RNC members (\$25 for a family of five), and \$15 for nonmembers (\$36 for a family of five). To reserve a spot, call 609-261-2495, or visit [rancocasnaturecenter.org](http://rancocasnaturecenter.org).