

# ECLIPSE FUELS FESTIVE MOOD

Upstate plays host to celebrations, family reunions

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The South Carolina license plates were vastly outnumbered Sunday in many corners of the Upstate, as eclipse chasers from throughout the eastern side of the country gathered for Monday's show.

In Anderson, out-of-state plates were common in the cluster of inns near Interstate 85, as southeastern families arrived to view Monday's total solar eclipse at one of its prime viewing areas.

"All my friends thought we were crazy for taking the kids out of school to see this," Atlanta area resident Stephanie Wheeler said Sunday as she played cards with husband Chad Wheeler, daughter Abigail and father Ed Ray in the lobby of Anderson's Hilton Garden Inn. "But as it grew near to the event, they understood."

Ray orchestrated the family event by prompting his daughter to book the room a year in advance. The family made the drive from Atlanta Sunday morning and planned to watch the eclipse from the Hilton parking lot.

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LAUREN PETRACCA/STAF

Walker Pape, 9, of Concord, North Carolina, looks at the surface of the sun through a telescope during the Eclipse Extravaganza at Roper Mountain Science Center on Sunday.

## Eclipse

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"We're camped right here," Chad Wheeler said. "We're not moving until after the eclipse,"

Families also gathered at Greenville's Roper Mountain Science Center, as family reunions spiced the second day of a three-day Eclipse Extravaganza.

Vehicles from throughout the East Coast, and as far away as Connecticut and Texas, brought an estimated 1,500 visitors to the center, in what served as a preview of Monday's total solar eclipse program.

Randa Mammarella, a grandmother living in Greenville, arrived at the center late morning as part of a group of eight. Most were children and grandchildren visiting from as far away as California.

"We started planning it two years ago. One of the kids called and said, 'Don't go anywhere that weekend — the place to be is at your house,'" Mammarella said as she waited her turn for a live glimpse of the sun through the science center's 23-foot telescope.

Her son, Bob Mammarella, saw a total solar eclipse in the 1970s, which made him all the more determined to travel from California to see this one.

Monday's eclipse also provided a family reunion for Susan Thomas of Taylors, who stood in line Sunday alongside daughter Robbin and grandsons Evan and Wesley, while son-in-law John Miranda toured other parts of the campus.

"I get to see my grandsons for a few days without leaving town," Thomas said.

For others, Monday's eclipse gave visitors a reason to see Greenville for the first time.

"Greenville was a lot easier to get to than most cities we looked at," said New York City resident Tinch Lee, who arrived in town Friday with wife Jennifer and twin boys that will celebrate their sixth birthday Monday. "We like everything we've seen so far."

Judy Burrell of Raleigh admits to being "obsessed" with the eclipse for more than six months, which prompted her to make reservations in 10 cities that were in the path of the total eclipse before she and husband Tim narrowed the list of destination spots to one.

"Of all the cities we looked at, Greenville seemed to have the best balance of not being so big that the crowd congestion was a problem, but being big enough to have plenty of restaurants."

A sellout crowd of 2,600 is expected Monday, easily making it the largest single-day crowd at the 32-year-old facility, best known to many for its Christmas lights and science exhibits.

Staff astronomer Lee Ott previewed Monday's eclipse progression to a steady stream of visitors at the Daniel Observatory, where eye safety was the most frequent question. He didn't seem to mind answering it often.

"It's exciting. It's the most people we've ever had on the mountain. It's our Super Bowl," Ott said.

On a humid Sunday afternoon, downtown Greenville sidewalks were busy. That made a busy day for Sarah Martin as she served shaved ice from The No-

madik Few booth on South Main.

"There are a lot more people out than normal for this time of day," Martin said at about 3 p.m. Sunday, as she worked near a parking lot that included license plates from Mississippi, New Jersey, Florida and North Carolina. "We've been

much busier than normal, and I think a lot of the customers have been from out of town."

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## What to know about viewing the eclipse

1. There are at least 46 eclipse-related events taking place in Greenville County today...

2. ... but you better get there early. There could be as many as 500,000 additional people in Greenville County today, which will make for some traffic headaches, to say the least.

3. All those people are here to catch an event that will last a little more than two minutes.

4. It'll be a breathtaking two minutes, though, if the weather cooperates. The latest forecast calls for mostly sunny skies and a high of 92 degrees in Greenville. So break out those solar eclipse specs and look up.

5. One of the more interesting eclipse viewing parties will be at Fluor Field where the Greenville Drive will pause their game during totality so fans and players can enjoy the show.

6. You can follow all of the eclipse-related events, including live video and continuously updating stories, for free on our website at GreenvilleOnline.com.