

Eclipse watchers from far and wide converge on World of Energy

BY STEPHANIE JADRNICEK
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SENECA — Eclipse chasers were waiting at the World of Energy gate at 5 a.m. Monday, and by early afternoon more than 1,200 people dotted Duke Energy's grounds.

But the education center staff had planned for the phenomenon for an entire year, so the event ran as smoothly as the solar eclipse.

"Our manager had the foresight a year ago to get ready for this," Duke Energy communications consultant Mikayla Kreuzberger said. "This event's been a whole team effort — we've got Duke Energy volunteers everywhere, and a lot of our on-site departments have helped out."

Cars with license plates from Georgia, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio and Connecticut rolled into the parking lot and unloaded anxious spectators. Mark Williams drove his family from Lawrenceville, Ga., including his parents, who had flown in from Austin, Texas, the day before.

"We saw a total solar eclipse in 1970," Mark's mother, Jeanette Williams, said. "We lived in New York at the time, and we drove down to Virginia Beach. The beach was full of people. We didn't have glasses back then, but my husband made us a little contraption so we could watch the eclipse. He's been looking for another one ever since."

Mark's father, David Williams, said the solar

eclipse of 1970 blew him away. The birds started chirping, the lights turned on and nighttime came early for a few minutes.

"I was hooked from then on," he said.

Greg and Lisa Corell from Pearisburg, Va., had also watched the 1970 eclipse, so when they heard about the 2017 eclipse, they started looking for the best place to view it.

"We wanted to get as close as we could to the path of totality, but at the same time we didn't want any crowds," Greg said.

So they drove for nearly five hours to reach the World of Energy in time for the eclipse.

"This will probably be the last time we get to see something like this," Lisa said.

The Huff family drove from Charlotte, N.C., and pitched a canopy, parked four chairs underneath and gathered around a game of Monopoly as they awaited the eclipse.

Like many others, Jen Huff had purchased eclipse viewing glasses from Amazon and received a recall notice last week. So Peter Huff devised a different plan.

"We started scrambling around on the internet trying to find something, and I saw that you could use a welding helmet," he said. "So I bought replace-

ment glass for a welding hood, and we've got our pinhole camera set up with our projector and binoculars."

When the moon covered about three-quarters of the sun, Mike Neuhauser pointed out the crescent-shaped shadows of leaves on the sidewalk while watching the eclipse with his wife, Anita.

"The spaces between the leaves are allowing very small beams of sunlight through, so you have these crescent-shaped images projected through a pinhole effect," he said. "There's a reversed image — that's what a pinhole camera does. It inverts the image. That's why the crescents are facing west when, if you look at the eclipse, the crescent is actually to your east."

As the moon moved completely into the path of the sun and its shadow cast over the World of Energy, cheers rose from the crowd, followed by a moment of silence. Between the 360-degree sunset and the calming sensation of an early-afternoon dusk, everyone was left speechless.

"You can clap as hard as you want, but you're not going to get an encore," Mike said as daylight re-emerged.

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