

Space in your face

By Elisha Cumbers
Staff Reporter

The first reaction of 99 per cent of people who see Darren Townsley's star dome is "Wow."

"I wanted something with more wow factor (than other systems)," said Townsley, owner of Star Dome, an innovative new business launching in Winnipeg.

It's hard not to be impressed with the giant inflatable dome, dark blue and looking bigger than its 12-feet by 16-feet dimensions when set up.

"We can fit 30, 35 people in there comfortably. A few more if everyone knows each other really, really well," he joked.

Like many Winnipeg small businesses, Townsley started Star Dome because he needed a job.

"I have a degree in physics and astronomy, and the Planetarium wasn't hiring. I thought, what am I going to do with these degrees?"

The answer was in an American company offering the projection and dome system that Townsley uses.

The dome, held up by air, is based on the same principle as the bouncing inflatables found at carnivals.

Inside, images spin dizzily across the curved sky, and Townsley takes groups across the universe with the power to zoom in to almost any object he chooses, like a telescope.

"Kids love it. I get a good reaction when the lights come on inside."

The computer and projection system also has the ability to go forward or backward in time to a span of 4,000 years either way.

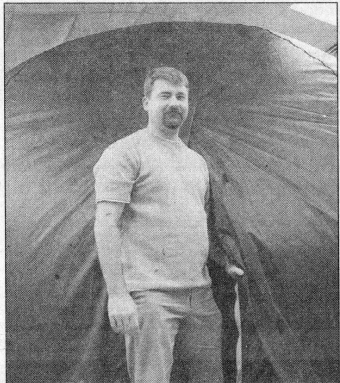


Photo by Elisha Cumbers

Darren Townsley said the first reaction to his Star Dome is usually "Wow!"

Townsley said his presentations, usually about an hour in length, clear up a lot of misconceptions about the universe for children and adults alike.

"Some of the more common misconceptions...that the moon doesn't rotate, or that in the summertime the Earth is closer to the sun than in the winter and that's why we have seasons, stuff like that."

Townsley said he is working on units for

Manitoba's Grade 6 star system unit, and Grade 8's Greek mythology units. "It's a great tool for teachers," said Townsley's wife Marni, who is a teacher by trade.

But Townsley said he hopes that private parties might be interested in his presentation too. "We just need a space to set up, but it can't be outside."

For more information, visit www.stardome.ca.

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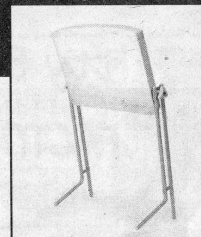
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