

## Innovation department seeks OHS observatory memories

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If all goes well, Odessa High School could reopen its rediscovered **observatory** later this spring.

Ector County ISD Chief **Innovation** Officer Jason Osborne said an email was sent about the **observatory**, which has been around since 1969.

**Innovation** Instructional Specialist Mary Fulton said they found out about the **observatory** in November and work started soon after.

“We scheduled some time to go over there and check out the **observatory**, and lo and behold, there were two really old telescopes that were still in place and still pointed up towards the sky just as though they were just placed there,” Osborne said. “They were in really good shape and the roof retracted away so you had an open view to the sky and we were just amazed so that built some excitement that **OHS** has this gem of an **observatory** that we felt we had to spend some time and some attention to get it back in order for kids to have an opportunity to get involved with hands-on science.”

He noted that everything was in working order.

A spiral staircase takes you up to a platform and there is a switch on the wall that you flip and the roof retracts.

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“So there’s a section of the roof that actually opens up to the sky. The fact that they thought of this and thought of putting this up there in 1969 is absolutely fascinating. There was a great movement for space exploration. We’re very interested in seeing who out there in the community is willing to come forward and talk about their experiences about being a student, or an educator at that time and share some insight of what that was like. We’d love to learn from the public ....,” Osborne said.

If anyone wants to share their experiences from the **OHS observatory**, they can contact Fulton at [Mary.fulton@ectorcountyisd.org](mailto:Mary.fulton@ectorcountyisd.org).

Parts were ordered to make repairs and the West Texas Astronomers Club is offering advice on how to best make those fixes and see what is needed.

A new state-of-the-art telescope was ordered to go up on that platform.

“That way students can look at old technology vs. new technology and look at the night sky,” Osborne said. “That’s all been a part of the PICK Education Chevron grant that covered the cost of the renovations and the new telescopes. We were hoping we would have it ready by the spring and then have a re-grand opening of the **observatory**.”

Fulton said the cost of equipment and repairs came to about \$15,000.

“We’ll also have cameras that will attach to the old telescopes, so students can download images to their iPads or their phones, as well,” Fulton said. “The two older telescopes will also be able to be used in ways they weren’t in ‘69.”

Osborne said this is a wonderful opportunity for students and ties in with the SpaceX technology that will be piloted in Pleasant

Farms to bring high-speed internet to that area.

“... We are looking at doing the student spaceflight experiments this year. Again, that would be a SpaceX rocket shooting up student experiments with the Mars rover landing and with the **observatory**,” he added.

**OHS** also is looking to add a 21-foot tall inflatable planetarium where up to 100 students at a time can look at the night sky.

It will be all interactive, Osborne said, and have a lot of different crossovers into many course areas.

“All this will go together really nicely into a really cool opportunity, and then outside of that we are gaining a ton of interest from UTPB to also collaborate with us on the astronomy tie and partner,” Osborne added.

“They currently do not have an **observatory**, so we can envision them partnering with us and coming over and using the **observatory** and then creating natural pathways for students to go into UTPB. We have been in communication with Dr. (Michael) Zavada at UTPB about this. He’s extremely excited and very ambitious to partner. We’ve already partnered with him to grow a geoscience program, which was new this past year, and now we’re looking at opportunities to possibly create a dual credit astronomy course,” Osborne said.

Zavada is professor and chair of the **Department** of Geosciences at UTPB.