

# Spring can be pinpointed to 9:41 a.m. Saturday

**SKY WATCH**  
**RAYMOND E. BULLOCK**

Hallelujah! Spring officially arrives for the northern hemisphere on Saturday, March 20, at 9:41 a.m. The official start of spring often puzzles people. Just what exactly determines the precise moment? The answer is the position of the sun with respect to a line called the celestial equator.

The earth's equator is a line that divides our planet into a northern and southern hemisphere. When this equator line is extended out into space it's called the celestial equator, and it divides the sky into two hemispheres as well.

Earth orbits the sun, but our planet's axis is tilted 23.5 degrees, so the sun may appear as much as 23.5 degrees above or 23.5 degrees below the celestial equator. In June the sun is at its highest above the equator, because the earth's northern hemisphere is tilted its most toward the sun, and we have summer.

## OCC offers addiction workshop

Addiction counselor Pia Melody will be featured in the March conference of Oakland Community College's Community Awareness Institute.

The program begins 7:30 p.m. Friday, March 19, with a lecture called "Spirituality: Our Greatest Source of Hope in Recovery" at the Royal Oak campus. Tickets are \$10 and can only be bought at the door.

Melody will conduct a seminar 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, March 20, at the Royal Oak campus called "Facing Co-dependence: From Co-dependence to Self Love." Advance registration is \$45 for students and \$65 for everyone else. Call 340-6772.

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In December the sun is at its lowest point, and we have winter. Obviously there are two points where the sun's pathway crosses the celestial equator. When the sun is traveling from its low point toward its high point, it crosses the celestial equator moving from south to north. The precise moment the sun crosses that line is the official start of spring.

The point of that crossing is the vernal equinox. Vernal is the Latin word for spring and equinox means "equal night." The length of the day is nearly equal to the length of night during this time. On the day of the vernal equinox the sun rises due east and sets due west.

We are rather shortighted in calling it the vernal equinox. We may be starting spring in the northern hemisphere, but the people below the equator are starting autumn.

To compensate for its extreme perigee earlier this month, the

moon's apogee (farthest distance from the earth) on the 21st is also its greatest for the year. The moon will be 406,631 kilometers (252,669 miles) away. So what if that's just four kilometers (2.5 miles) farther than it was in February; it's still farther.

New Moon will occur at 2:14 a.m. on March 23. The moon will be between the earth and the sun and will not be visible. Try spotting the moon on the evening of the 23rd. Look toward the west

around 7:10 p.m. and locate Venus, 10 degrees above the horizon. The moon will be seven degrees below (three degrees above the horizon), and binoculars will help you in locating it. On the next evening the moon will be higher in the sky and easy to see.

On the evening of the 27th, the moon will be in Taurus once again. The moon's upper cusp (top of the crescent) will be two degrees to the left of the Pleiades star cluster. On the next evening

the moon's lower cusp will be five degrees above and to the right of Aldebaran.

The second First Quarter Moon of the month will occur at 11:10 p.m. on the 30th.

Raymond Bullock is the former coordinator of the planetarium and observatory at the Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bloomfield Hills. He now works at a Troy-based firm that specializes in laser displays and effects.

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