



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA AIKEN



**John Hutchens**

Thursday, May 21, 2020

John Hutchens, director of special programs at Ruth Patrick Science Education Center, quickly adapted his programs to provide engaging learning opportunities even during a pandemic.

Upon hearing of the public schools' closures, John immediately started working on some ideas to continue enriching K-12 students' educational experiences by providing new approaches to engaging them.

Hutchens' efforts led to several virtual field trips, which can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/RPSECVirtualFieldTrips>. These virtual experiences highlight several residents who call RPSEC home, including reptiles, owls, and amphibians. Students can learn more about the RPSEC sundials, take an eco-hike through Hitchcock Woods, or explore the longleaf pine ecosystem at the Silver Bluff Audubon Center. All while sitting at their computers.

For the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, he developed a week-long series of activities for Earth Week, which the public could take part in virtually.

Most recently, the DuPont Planetarium and Evans & Sutherland, the world's leading producer and distributor of full-dome planetarium shows, entered into a partnership to offer the community the Virtual In-home Planetarium (VIP) Experience.

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"Because COVID-19 prevents the DuPont Planetarium from offering shows in person, we are excited to offer this VIP experience that allows anyone with an internet signal to view free streaming shows," Hutchens said.

"These shows are great for families, educators, and anyone else that has an interest in the heavens above."

For the next few weeks, the Dupont Planetarium will release a new show on Thursdays at <http://www.usca.edu/planetarium/VIP>.

*We certainly miss seeing our patrons and K-12 students and look forward to having them back on campus as soon as possible. Until then, we hope they enjoy these virtual experiences. We are extremely grateful to John, who led the effort to make them possible.*

**–Dr. Gary Senn, Director of the Ruth Patrick Science Education Center**