

Dangers of sun exposure come to light through RAYS art project

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To highlight the dangers of sun exposure, the Regional Chronic Disease Coalition (RCDC) of Morris and Somerset Counties is hosting a free Solar Sun event as part of its Raise Awareness about your Sun Art Project.

Taking place at 10 a.m., and 2 and 4 p.m. Saturday at XACT Studios in Hillsborough, the event features Paul Cirillo, a member of the New Jersey Astronomical Association, an ambassador for the Jet Propulsion Laboratory's Solar System Ambassador Program, and a leader for Somerset County's 4H Astronomy Club.

Through satellite images and hands-on activities, Cirillo will share information about the positive and negative aspects of the sun and its rays, and how it directs our solar system.

"The sun maintains a very delicate balance — without it we wouldn't be here on Earth, but if Earth were positioned a little closer or even farther away, we wouldn't be here," Cirillo said. "And that same balance applies to our bodies, like our skin. The sun, just like anything else in life, has its good and bad components."

In addition to Solar Sun, the RAYS Art Project includes an exhibit that will be on display during the event and continue through Aug. 16. The exhibit features artwork from local photographers and artists throughout Somerset and Morris counties.

Nancy Edwards, a member of the RCDC,

facilitated and developed the RAYS Art Project. As an artist and owner of Creative Spaces, a company she started to run therapeutic art programs for children, teenagers and families, Edwards said she believed art would be a powerful way to communicate the RCDC's warnings about the sun.

"I knew artists and photographers would be willing to be a part of such an important project to get the word out," she said. "In addition, my Mom died at an early age of 50 from melanoma so I did this project in her honor."

According to Edwards, 120 art pieces were submitted for the exhibit and a judging panel of professional artists and photographers narrowed down the submissions to 40.

"It is a very diverse exhibit," Edwards said. "Some of the work on display includes sunrises and sunsets, either abstract or realistic. And there are pieces that show glimpses of the sun's rays passing through trees and reflections, both through and on water."

Literature and information about the harmful effects of sun exposure without proper skin protection is also available at the exhibit. Lucille Y-Talbot, public health coordinator of RCDC, oversaw the educational aspect of the project. Because skin cancer is the most common type of cancer, she said that it is crucial for people to be educated about the disease.

“The incidence of skin cancer is rising, especially among our youth and we need to inform them how to protect themselves while still enjoying outdoor activities year round,” she said. “We continually encourage all residents, including young people, to conduct self-exams and to get regular skin checkups by healthcare professionals.”

Cirillo said he believes it’s important to educate the public about the sun.

“The sun is the center of life,” he said. “It’s the most powerful force in our solar system and we need to understand it and respect it.”

XACT Studios is at 411 Route 206 south, Suite 5, in Hillsborough. Visit www.astronomynj.com/ for more information on Cirillo’s solar system presentations.

