

Tar Heels prepared to play without Marshall

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The end of the world as we know it?

White: The Mayan calendar not designed to predict doomsday

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MORGANTON — Will the world end on Dec. 12, 2012 — the final day in the Mayan calendar?

Andy White said he doesn't know.

But he is sure of one thing: the Mayans weren't predicting

the world's end when they designed the calendar.

White, an instructor of physics and astronomy at Western Piedmont Community College, said in a Tuesday night presentation that it's merely when their calendar restarts, comparing it to an odometer rolling over.

But he said that end date has captured the attention of many as the Mayans are "almost the superhuman,

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MATTHEW HENSLEY/THE NEWS HERALD

Andy White, a WPCC astronomy and physics instructor, spoke Tuesday night at WPCC's Leviton auditorium about the Mayan calendar.

Mayan

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superheroes of the ancient world." Some even believe they were aliens because of their complex understanding of astronomy.

"We make the Mayans out to be a mysterious and almost enigmatic culture," White said. "That's because they are a mysterious and enigmatic culture."

According to the WPCC instructor, the Mesoamerican civilization, which

reached its height between 200 and 900 AD, has kept the modern world mystified for four reasons:

» The Mayans had meticulous architectural and city designs that aligned buildings with the sun, moon and stars.

» The culture developed sophisticated calendars — at least 25 known calendars — including the long-form one that ends this year.

» The civilization developed sophisticated hieroglyphs and art.

FROM THE FRONT/STATE/NATION

» All but four pieces of Mayan writings were destroyed by the Spanish, leaving a lot of questions about the culture.

The calculations the Mayans used were incredible, according to White.

They had a 365-day calendar for the year that took into account that years are a tad more than 365 days, much like how we use leap year.

White said their calendar calculates a year about seven-tenths of a second different from how

modern astronomers measure years. Complex tables for the planets and stars carry a similar accuracy.

White said he hoped the about 75 people in attendance at Western Piedmont's Leviton auditorium for his presentation learned one thing: that Mayans were people, too.

"Yeah, the Mayans had some great accomplishments," he said. "They were very clever ... But there is a lot of humanity to it."