



THE FIELD OF VIEW (F.O.V.) National Public Observatory Newsletter **“Where the Public Meets the Stars”**

Astronomy education, dark skies and quality experiences for ALL!!
Funded in part by the New Mexico Space Grant Consortium

Volume 2, Issue XXI

STARS-N-PARKS PROGRAMS IN SEVEN SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO STATE PARKS

Winter 2004

The Wes Light Story / New NPO Member has own Observatory

By Jessica Savage

Maybe it was his name - Wesley means west meadow - and well you know what Light means - but when Wes Light bought property 10 years ago south of Deming in an area called Sunshine, he said it was for the dark skies.

Light is the newest corporate member of the National Public Observatory and could prove to be a very valuable one. His interest in astronomy was first sparked when he received his first telescope as a Christmas gift from his father when he was a boy. Now he has an observatory dome built onto his house in honor of his late father and funded by his inheritance according to his father's wishes.

“I feel a connection to the universe,” Light said when speaking of observing from his backyard.

In the 10 years that Light has lived in Sunshine he said he has noticed a light pollution encroachment and worries that a dairy or other industrial facility will be built nearby and ruin his ability to enjoy the dark sky. For that reason, he is hoping to influence Luna County to preserve its' dark skies with an ordinance. Light has political connections through serving on city of Deming commissions so he may be an effective voice.

Since purchasing his C-14 Celestron 14" SCT telescope, Light said he still hasn't used it to its' full potential, partly because he's still learning the software and also because of one of his other interests - solar energy diverts his attention.

Light's beautiful desert home is 80 percent energized through electricity he produces himself with solar panels.

Both Light and his wife, Dr. Diane Bell travel back and forth between New York and New Mexico for their jobs. A former lawyer, Light now works in alternative dispute resolution as a mediator/arbitrator/facilitator. Bell is a physician who provides guidance to the pharmaceutical industry. The couple uses their corporation Gadcom, Inc. to manage assets and investments they have, and for consulting work that Light engages in. Please join the NPO in welcoming Wes Light to our organization.

Stars-N-Doors brings astronomy knowledge inside

By Jessica Savage

Every Stars-N-Parks astronomy outreach program reveals the public's hunger for astronomy facts, information and trivia, so the National Public Observatory is responding by offering a free monthly educational meeting called Stars-N-Doors.

“We want to give the public a chance to meet us in the light,” said NPO President John Gilkison.

Monthly sessions have been scheduled starting in January 2005 through May 2005, and are open to the public and NPO members. Every month Stars-N-Parks presenters field numerous questions about deep sky objects, equipment and space trivia.

“One kid wanted to know how aliens can survive in outer space,” said NPO Presenter Bobby Franzoy.

Each indoor astronomy session will include an informative talk by an NPO member on subjects such as finding objects in a telescope, viewing craters of the Moon and an in-depth look at a specific constellation. Periodically, special classes will be offered for a fee on subjects such as How to buy a telescope and How to use your new goto telescope.

continued on pg 2



Wes Light inside the three meter dome by the 14 inch SCT on a Losmandy mount and a piggy backed 104 mm Tele Vue refractor.

Stars-N-Doors brings astronomy knowledge inside

"We're not a traditional amateur club," said Gilkison, "We are focused on the 'lay' public, beginners who need help overcoming the obstacles to appreciating astronomy, such as learning the sky and astronomy equipment."

The meetings are intended to enhance Stars-N-Parks attendees observing sessions. "People can put what they learned in the meeting into practice," said NPO Secretary/Treasurer Lana Gilkison.

Another goal of the meetings is to recruit more members for the NPO who are willing to support mission goals and are also seeking fellowship with other amateurs. Members receive a quarterly newsletter, access to the NPO catalog, discounts on classes and events with fees such as the biannual Southern New Mexico Star Party held each Spring and Fall at City of Rocks State Park.

"We're planning on holding Members-Only Star parties every month or two in remote dark sky locations near Hatch and Deming," Gilkison said.

By being an NPO member and becoming more involved in the non-profit organization, people will have access to amateurs with expertise in the night sky and telescopes, as well as a sense of camaraderie with others who share their interest.

"We think it's a great idea," Gilkison said. "It gives people a chance to interact with us in a way they can't in the dark because we're busy conducting a program. We want them to learn more about the NPO in a classroom environment"

Classes will be held one Saturday a month from 4 to 5:30 p.m. in the Board Room of the Las Cruces Branigan Public Library on the following dates in 2005: January 22, February 26, March 26, and April 23. Attendance is free and open to anyone, no prior enrollment necessary.

The Wes Light three meter astronomy dome at his home southwest of Deming, New Mexico.



Stars-N-Parks program expanded in 2004

By Jessica Savage

More Southwestern New Mexicans were awe inspired this year because they saw constellations, planets, globular clusters and galaxies when they attended a National Public Observatory-sponsored Stars-N-Parks astronomy program in 2004.

The public outreach program expanded due in large part to the grant received from the New Mexico Space Grant Consortium, which allowed the NPO to hire more presenters.

"We offered more programs with more presenters," NPO President John Gilkison said, "We now have three local presenters and one at Blue Water State Park."

Two state parks were added to the schedule - Blue Water and Oliver Lee, and a total of 31 Stars-N-Parks programs were held, up from 20 in 2003. The NPO pays a \$50 fee and mileage at a rate of 36 cents-per-mile to program presenters, who must bring and set up their own telescope to the park, conduct a night-sky tour and assist the public in viewing deep-space objects through the eyepiece of their own telescope. Until the NPO had the ability to hire more presenters Gilkison was the only presenter available most months.

"I can now schedule two programs on the same night, even three at times when I used to only be able to do one," Gilkison said. "There's only two Saturdays a month that we can have programs because of the Moon, so this really helps."

City of Rocks State Park received the biggest boost from the grant with a doubling in the number of programs held there over the past year - up from four programs to eight, four of which were held in the fall. The park has also received attention from the state as an astronomy site. Construction on a permanent observatory will begin there in January 2005.

The biannual Southern New Mexico Star Party is held at City of Rocks S. P. each spring and fall, and the highlight is always the well-attended Saturday night Stars-N-Parks program where three-to-four-dozen locals are exposed to amateur astronomy.

Also, two special Stars-N-Parks sessions were held this year during Lunar Eclipses in May and October. The October program received special attention in a front-page news story in the Las Cruces Sun News. The article's aim was to give readers information on viewing the eclipse and where they might be able to attend a program or look through a telescope. The National Public Observatory was given first mention in the story and NPO officials were quoted. Approximately 50 to 60 people attended the midweek program.

Having several presenters gives the Stars-N-Parks

continued on pg 3



City of Rocks State Park rocks silhouetted in the glow of evening twilight before the Saturday night public program at the Fall 2004 SNMSP.

cont. Stars-N-Parks program expanded in 2004

continued from pg 2

diversity and a new perspective. As John and Lana Gilkison reflected on the last year and what diversity means to a public outreach program, Lana recalled a star party that was held at Pancho Villa State Park, which is on the United States-Mexico border. A busload of Spanish-speaking kids and their parents came from Palomas, Mexico to attend the star party, and while the kids enjoyed looking through the telescopes it was the parents that were really astounded.

“They were looking at things they had seen with their naked eye all their lives and when they saw them through the telescope it was a whole new world - literally,” John Gilkison said.

The parents were excited and grateful, Lana said, they kept mentioning the craters of the Moon. “It made the Moon more real to them,” she said.

Lana attributed the parent’s excitement to the fact that looking through a telescope was a new experience for them, and that there’s an innate curiosity about astronomy that crosses all language and cultural barriers.

“There’s no language barrier between the Moon and a telescope,” she said.

Stars-N-Parks brings astronomy to people by eliminating the barriers which allows the NPO to achieve it’s mission goals. “Whether you speak Spanish or with an Alabama accent, astronomy appeals to everyone,” Gilkison said.

Charles Wilson NPO’s newest presenter NPO Presenters in 2004

Charles Wilson has joined the NPO’s list of presenters, and is doing programs at Leasburg Dam State Park. Lets give a hand to all the presenters who made the NPO mission of bringing astronomy to the public possible in 2004. They are-

- 1: Jeff Jenkins from Las Cruces, New Mexico
- 2: Bobby Franzoy from Hatch , New Mexico
- 3: Matt Wilson from Silver City, New Mexico
- 4: John Pijawka from Gallup, New Mexico
- 5: Joseph Hecker from Las Cruces, New Mexico
- 6: Charles Wilson from Las Cruces, New Mexico
- 7: John Gilkison from Radium Springs, NM

New or Renewed NPO Members

Lynn Ames from Las Cruces, New Mexico
 Bobby Franzoy from Hatch, New Mexico
 Ashley Gilkison from Radium Springs, NM
 Ed Ward from Del Norte, Colorado



NPO President John Gilkison beside the 12 inch SCT with piggy backed Stella Cam EX during the Saturday SNMSP public night.

Annual Membership Application or Renewal:
Please circle one of the following:

	Member	Sponsor	Supporter	Patron	Lifetime
Individual	\$35	\$50	\$100	\$400	\$600
Family	\$50	\$100			
Student or Retiree	\$20	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Astronomy clubs < 80 members	\$50	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Libraries	\$50	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Corporate & Government	\$100	\$200	\$400	\$1,500	\$2,500

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ABOUT THE NATIONAL PUBLIC OBSERVATORY PROJECT

Tens of thousands of people visit major U.S. research astronomical observatories every year. These research facilities do not advertise, and quite altruistically, set aside monies and time from their limited budgets to accommodate the public. Many people travel great distances for the opportunity to observe through a world-class telescope but due to the high cost of telescope time, this generally is not feasible. Where observatories have been able to set aside a night for public observing, it is often booked up well in advance.

While some upscale observatory/lodge facilities have been developed, none have been established to reach families or individuals looking for an intimate public park/camping experience with the proper telescopes, facilities, and knowledgeable tour guides.

The National Public Observatory, Inc. has been established to provide this kind of facility and we need your help.

Please join the National Public Observatory or make your tax-deductible contribution today!